CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

HIP HOP AS A FORM OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY:
TEACHER PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership

by

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May 2013
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Dedication

“So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13 Revised Standard Version). This is the verse from the bible that is etched onto the tombstone of my father’s grave. My father, a lifelong educator, scholar, historian, professor, humanitarian, and author, as well as a loyal husband, loving father, grandfather, and a great friend passed away on May 29, 2011 towards the end of my first year into my Doctoral program. He and my mother first met in college, fell in love, and the rest was history. They both had a passion for education. They both became teachers, advisors, and administrators. They both went through great lengths and made countless sacrifices to make sure that my brother and I also valued the importance of an education. They both paved the way for my pursuit in education; as a student, scholar, and educator. It is with their guidance and support that I have been able to successfully pursue and complete my Doctorate. This being said, this dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my dear father, as well as my loving mother. May the memory and honor of all of my dad’s contributions continue to be hailed by all the lives he has had the pleasure of touching through his many years as an educator.

Dad, I did it.
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ABSTRACT

HIP HOP AS A FORM OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS ON THE EFFECTS OF HIP HOP BASED INSTRUCTION ON LOW-INCOME URBAN SECONDARY STUDENTS IN RELATION TO STUDENT MOTIVATION AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

by

Ike Asadour Terjimanian

Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership

For decades there exist wide disparities in achievement between Black and Latino students and their White counterparts. This qualitative case study, framed within an interpretivist research paradigm borrowing principles of ethnography, explores the perceptions and experiences of ten secondary urban teachers throughout the greater Los Angeles area who incorporate Hip Hop - as a form of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy - within the curriculum in their respective classrooms. Specifically, this study examines to what extent teachers’ experiences have improved teacher/student relationships, increased student motivation and engagement, and affected student academic achievement. Findings from this study suggest that when Hip Hop is incorporated within the curriculum during instruction, positive teacher/student relationships are established, student’s become more engaged in their learning, and students are motivated to succeed academically. This study concludes with recommendations that include the need for
further exploration on the effects of Hip Hop based instruction in relation to student academic achievement; additional research to be conducted in understanding the experiences and perceptions of parents’ thought and beliefs on the effects of Hip Hop being incorporated in their child’s education; and finally recommending that teachers and administrators be provided resources and opportunities to better understand how to incorporate Hip Hop as a form of culturally relevant pedagogy within their urban spaces of learning.
CHAPTER 1

HIP HOP AS A FORM OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

Introduction

It is apparent that America has become accustomed to the achievement gap between Black and Latino students and their White counterparts (Burke & Ladner, 2010). Despite the intention of No Child Left Behind, significant disparities are still evident in the achievement gap between Black and Latino students and their White peers in U.S. public schools (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002; Haycock, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lee, 2002; Peske & Haycock, 2006; Schwartz, 2001). Schools are failing to promote and establish high expectations that encourage all students to succeed (Howard, 2008; Schwartz, 2001), particularly Black and Latino students. Unable to find solutions to closing the achievement gap, it has become increasingly important for educators to examine the current state of K-12 education and explore alternative ways of addressing these disparities. A promising alternative might be embracing alternative pedagogical practices that truly address the needs of those students who are not meeting the academic expectations of schools, districts, and the states.

Problem Statement

The issue of using Hip Hop as a form of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) to motivate students to improve academic achievement is particularly important considering the continued gap in achievement between Black and Latino students and their White counterparts. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2001), by 1999, only 1 in 50 Latino and 1 in 100 Black 17-year-olds were able to read and gain information from specialized text, compared to 1 in 12 White high school students. About
1 in 30 Latino and 1 in 100 Black high school seniors could comfortably do multistep problem solving and elementary algebra, compared to 1 in 10 White seniors. Only 3 in 10 Black and 4 in 10 Latino 17-year-olds mastered the usage and computation of fractions, commonly used percent’s, and averages, compared to 7 in 10 White seniors. By the end of high school, Black and Latino students had skills in both reading and mathematics that were the same as those of White students in 8th grade. According to the Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Minorities (2010) report by NCES, by 2005, 29% of White high school seniors scored at proficient or advanced in mathematics achievement while only 6% of Black and 8% of Latino students scored proficient. The study continues to state that by 2009, 44% of White eighth graders scored proficient or advanced in mathematic achievement, while 12% of Black students and 17% of Latino students scored proficient. Once again, we see a minimum of a 20% disparity between the achievement of Black and Latino students and their White counterparts. The disparities in achievement factor into lowered graduation rates of high school students, college entry rates, college preparedness, and college completion rates.

According to Dillon (2009), the achievement gap between minority students and their “White” counterparts was not narrowed in recent years, despite the intention of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). In 2008, for example, the achievement gap between Black and White high school seniors was 29 points in reading and 26 points in math. NCLB has not closed most achievement gaps to an appreciable degree though it has been a decade since the law was passed. While National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results show that, over time, Black and Latino students have made great strides in improving performance in reading and mathematics, a breach still separated them from
their White peers, usually with at least a 20 point difference in scores (Dillon, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Experts agree that these results are evidence that No Child Left Behind has failed to make serious headway in lifting academic achievement, particularly with Black and Latino students.

**Background**

One factor that contributes to the achievement gap is the disconnect between curricular knowledge and relationships that teachers have with the everyday lives of their Black and Latino students (Dimitriadis, 2009). Linton and Singleton (2006) suggest that educator’s need to focus their attention on the intercultural relationships of their students based on race. They continue by stating that the school day is full of multiple opportunities for teachers to connect with or disconnect with their students. Based on these opportunities, Linton and Singleton feel that a student’s ability to succeed falls on the hands of the teachers (2006).

There is also a growing disconnect between teachers and administrators of public urban schools, and popular culture. Low (2010) states that “despite the growing number of calls to integrate popular youth culture into curriculum” (p. 195), school officials fail to take popular culture into consideration when creating an academic curriculum. Alvermann, Jennifer, and Margaret (1999) feel that the disconnect “between teachers and students and the ethereal nature of the popular” create an “impossible” understanding and appreciation of the youth culture. According to Callahan and Low (2004), teachers feel that if they do have a better understanding of popular culture, and if their students realize that the teacher is appreciative of their culture; they become vulnerable, and the teacher will ultimately lose their “authority and expertise.”
Morrell (2002), states that when incorporating popular culture within the curriculum for urban students of color, educators are providing a logical connection between lived experiences of their students and the school culture. Much of the excitement about popular culture in the United States is tempered by the recent focus, at the state and national levels, on standardized tests as the sole evaluators of academic merit and skill. Ladson-Billings (1994) believes that educators should envision teaching popular culture as a compatible pedagogical practice with the current educational climate and, at the same time, as culturally and socially relevant. By creating and incorporating Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) within the curriculum, teachers empower students’ intellectuality, social growth, emotional stability, and political understanding (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Hip Hop is one form of CRP that can decrease the disconnect between teachers and students and also empower students to succeed academically. Low (2011) states that, “Teacher-student relationships are central to culturally relevant pedagogies and need to be fluid, equitable, and extend beyond the classroom” (p. 104). “Hip hop has emerged as a critical out-of-school curriculum for young people in the United States and around the world” (Dimitriadis, 2009, p. xviii). Academic institutions are beginning to recognize the value and importance of Hip Hop culture and the advantages of using Hip Hop to bridge the disconnect between students and school, and their personal lives and experiences outside of school, into the academy, thereby enhancing English instruction (Hamm Forell, 2006). Incorporating Hip Hop as a form of CRP can bridge Black and Latino students’ understanding of canonical texts (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002, 2004; Weinstein, 2007). Perchauer (2009) indicates that research has demonstrated that Hip
Hop based instruction can and has helped to develop critical literacy and academic skills for urban students of color. Stovall (2006) agrees, stating that Hip Hop culture, being so relevant in so many high school students’ lives; being taught in classrooms can bridge ideas and tasks pertinent in the curriculum that promotes critical understanding. Dyson (2007) adds, “Hip Hop music is important precisely because it sheds light on contemporary politics, history, and race” that are so fundamental in teaching strategies that improve literary and artistic conventions (p. xvi). If teachers, administrators, schools, and districts are truly willing to address the problems associated with the achievement gap in the United States, they should really consider exploring the effects of CRP, culturally responsive teaching practices, the perceptions of teachers who incorporate Hip Hop within the academic curriculum, and the effects of Hip Hop based instruction in relation to student motivation and academic achievement.

**Purpose and Significance**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the perceptions and experiences of teachers who incorporate Hip Hop as a form of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) within the curriculum during instruction in low-income urban secondary schools. Specifically, this study will examine to what extent teachers perceive their experiences have increased student motivation and academic achievement among low-income urban secondary school students of color. This study also seeks to address the potential educational benefits that incorporating Hip Hop - as a form of popular culture within the curriculum - could have towards addressing the achievement gap in public, low-income urban secondary schools.
The current teaching force is disproportionately unrepresentative of the students they aim to serve in terms of race and class (Jordan-Irvine, 2003; Runell Hall, 2011). As technology is rapidly advancing and the accessibility of popular culture is so readily available to the youth - simply by clicking on a mouse - it is critical that educators stay connected with current popular culture trends that capture the interest and attention of the youth. Hip Hop is one form of popular culture that not only has a current grasp on the attention of today’s youth, but is additionally a culture that low-income marginalized children of color could associate with and relate to.

According to Ladson-Billings (1995) and Nieto (1999), embedding Hip Hop into the curriculum and utilizing it as a form of pedagogy can become a significant factor in closing the achievement gap between Black and Latino students and their White counterparts by creating a more engaging learning environment. Scholars suggest that Hip Hop also provides the necessary bridge connecting Black and Latino students to academic goals, as well as creating an understanding and belief in their own potential and academic brilliance (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2002; Dyson, 2007; Gilyard, 1996; Giroux, 1997; Hall, 2007; Hamm Forell, 2006; Hanley, 2006; Hill, 2009; Low, 2011; Stovall, 2006). For this reason alone, it is significant to explore the perceptions of these teachers who have experience incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum at secondary urban schools.

Hip Hop is already being used by educators to bridge the achievement gap and help Black and Latino students achieve desired academic goals (Dimitriadis, 2001; Hill, 2009; Howard, 2010). A study on the effects of Hip Hop based instruction in relation to student motivation and academic achievement is also significant because of the
increasing interconnection between the current generation of urban Black and Latino students and popular culture genres such as Hip Hop (Runell Hall, 2011). As Hip Hop continues to grow and morph itself into every aspect of popular culture, fiercely grasping the attention of Black and Latino students in urban communities, researchers and scholars need to continue to explore the perceptions of teachers who have experienced the effects that Hip Hop has had on increasing student motivation and improving academic achievement during instruction in the classroom. Gaining a better understanding of teacher experiences when incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum of urban secondary schools can provide some much needed data on the benefits or drawbacks that Hip Hop instruction can have in regards to student motivation and academic achievement of Black and Latino students. The findings from this study can inform the ongoing conversation regarding the incorporation of Hip Hop as a form of CRP within the curriculum at secondary urban schools amongst scholars, practitioners, schools, and districts.

**Research Questions**

There are many teachers across this country who are already using Hip Hop within the curriculum. Hamm Forell (2006) states, “Using hip-hop in the classroom empowers youth to become active partners in education rather than mere spectators” (p. 33). The questions I will be posing in this study are geared towards those teachers who have experience incorporating Hip Hop based instruction into the curriculum in their classrooms. The following are the key research questions in this study:

1. What experiences have teachers had when incorporating Hip Hop based instruction within the curriculum in low-income urban secondary schools?
2. What do teachers who use Hip Hop based instruction within the curriculum perceive to be the benefits (if any) related to student motivation in low-income urban secondary school students?

3. What do teachers who use Hip Hop based instruction within the curriculum perceive to be the benefits (if any) related to student academic achievement in low-income urban secondary school students?

In order to examine these issues, I will borrow the principles of an ethnographic research tradition where through interviews I will be accessing teachers’ interpretations of this social phenomenon. My research will explore the experiences of teachers from multiple educational sites across the greater Los Angeles area. Specifically, my research will be conducted in low-income communities with a predominately high population of Black and Latino students.

**Summary**

Although, as you will read in the Literature Review, there is research that suggests that incorporating Hip Hop and popular culture within the curriculum can produce clear connections to identity and the understanding of what it means to be Black or Latino in a marginalized society, improve student motivation and academic achievement, and create spaces where students feel that they are actually welcomed participants in an academic setting, there is much further research that needs to be conducted. In regard to the work that has already been conducted, Dimitriadis (2009) states, “this work has not taken seriously the notion that young people themselves make sense out of this music and this culture in ways that often exceed the predictive ability of adults and others … this ‘opening up’ of hip hop to scholarly study has not been accompanied by the kinds of personal dislocations often associated with ethnographic work” (p. 157). Hopefully my
study will add to the body of research and shine some light on the advantages and
disadvantages of incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum by exploring the
experiences and perceptions of teachers who have and continue to incorporate Hip Hop
within the curriculum.

Chapter two will provide a review of the literature to identify and describe the
existing scholarship on the achievement gap, economic challenges of low-income Black
and Latino students, teacher perceptions, culturally responsive teaching practices, CRP,
and Hip Hop education. Chapter three will provide the detailed methodology that will be
employed in this research study. Chapter four will provide the results or findings that
were discovered in the collection and analysis of the data. Chapter five will provide
discussion and conclusions of the data based on the researcher’s interpretation of the
findings or results. This dissertation will conclude with references followed by an
appendix of related documents.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although research has shown some improvements in the academic achievement of Black and Latino students throughout the last 30 years, there still exists a significant achievement gap between Black and Latino students and their White counterparts (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002; Haycock, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lee, 2002; Peske & Haycock, 2006; Schwartz, 2001). Studies have shown improvements in student academic achievement when the use of Culturally Relevant Pedagogies are practiced (King, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002; Watkins, 2005), especially with low-income students of color.

In the following chapter, in order to situate this proposed study, I will first review the literature on the educational crisis facing Black and Latino students in the United States. The literature being reviewed will include, but will not be limited to, the achievement gap, struggles of socio-economically challenged students and America’s poverty rate, and teacher preparation and perceptions of low-income students of color. Next, I will review the literature on what is already known about Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), particularly when incorporated into the curriculum in low-income urban secondary schools. I will then review some of the literature on Hip Hop as one form of CRP. This chapter ends with a summary of the review and implications for the proposed study.
Educational Crisis for the Black and Latino Achievement Gap

Studies show that in the 1970s and 1980s, the achievement gap between Black and Latino students versus their White counterparts narrowed tremendously (Barton & Coley, 2010; Carnoy, 1994; Haycock, 2001; Howard, 2010; Hrabowski, 2004; Lee, 2002; Thernstrom, 2002). According to Haycock (2001), between 1970 and 1980, achievement gaps between African American students and White students were cut in half, and the gap separating Latino students and White students declined by one-third. But research shows that as of 1988, these gaps began to widen. Although students of color made significant gains in closing this gap in the 1980s, it widened once again during the 1990s (Barton & Coley, 2010; Carnoy, 1994; Haycock, 2001; Howard, 2010; Hrabowski, 2004; Lee, 2002; Thernstrom, 2002). Thernstrom (2002) attributes one of the reasons of the increased gap to the decreased expectations of students who attend regular public schools. But Barton & Coley (2010), who have done substantial research on the achievement gap, state that there simply is not enough empirical evidence to say why the gaps have widened since the early 90’s. Although the shift, Barton and Coley argue, could be attributed to factors such as parental income, parental education, occupation, and class-size, these factors are “largely suggestion, not conclusive” (p. 35).

Some of the attributing factors responsible for the disparities of the achievement gap are associated with the apathetic attitudes displayed by educators who believe in and subscribe to deficit models (Freire, 1970, 1973; Howard, 2010; Low, 2011). Too often, educators feel that students of color from low-income backgrounds are not “fit” for academic success due to their poverty status, lack of motivation for high achievement,
poor command of Standard English, intellectual deficiency, and their overall lack of value towards education (Bernstein, 1961; J.E. King, 1991; Pine & Hilliard, 1990; Riessman, 1962). Howard (2010) asserts that deficit-based notions of students, low expectations, and less than ideal instructional quality are all possibilities when teachers question the intellectual capability of any student, but these issues are most harmful when students’ abilities are questioned based solely on factors such as their socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, culture, language, or gender (p. 42). In a study conducted by Howard (2010), 80 percent of the 250 Black and Latino high school students surveyed responded “yes” when asked if their race caused their teachers to view them negatively. Ninety percent agreed that their race plays a role in how their teachers perceive them. Yet scholars have found that lower performance is not linked to the cultural diversity or the income-status of students (Boykin, 1994; Hale-Benson, 1986; Kochman, 1981; Lee, 1995, 2007). Darling-Hammond (2007) maintains that “educational outcomes for students of color are much more a function of their unequal access to key educational resources, including skilled teachers and quality curriculum, than they are a function of race” (p. 230).

In a study conducted by Noguera (2004) on the reform process of urban high schools in Boston, Massachusetts, students were questioned about their thoughts on teacher’s perceptions of their academic well-being. The study took place at ten urban high schools which included four comprehensive schools, three pilot schools, two charter schools, and one exam school. The majority of the student populations were students of color who came from low-income families. The students were asked if they felt that their teachers believed that they could do well and succeed in school. Fifty six percent of all
the students at eight of those schools stated that they did not believe that their teachers
cared if they succeeded or not. In addition, most of the students reported that there were
no adults at their school whom they could speak to about any personal problems. As a
result, many of the students at eight of the ten schools studied in Boston were not able to
pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exam. When
students do not feel accepted for their individual identity in schools or do not feel that
their teachers have faith in their academic abilities, barriers will exist that prevent them
from being academically and socially successful. Scholars Hollins (1994) and King
(1994) maintain that for many Black students in this country, school is an alien and
hostile place where they feel that they are not really welcomed. In a different study
conducted by Howard (2010), 90 Black and Latino high school sophomores and juniors
in Los Angeles participated in focus groups and interviews. Those students felt that their
teachers refer to classes of Black and Latino students as “stupid” and “lazy” and felt
teachers do not truly understand or appreciate their culture. These feelings will definitely
make students feel unwelcomed, unwanted, and alien (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005;
Emdin, 2010; Hill, 2009; Howard, 2002; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Taliaferro
rather than making students feel a sense of alienation, schools should be a place where
students are encouraged to engage in intellectual curiosity and critical thought.

There are alternative methods of making culturally diverse students feel
welcomed in school, as well as assisting students in improving their academic
achievement. Niebuhr and Niebuhr (1999) found that student achievement increased
when teachers demonstrated a warm and friendly attitude towards their students. Delpit
(1991) states that if teachers are to teach effectively, recognition of the importance of the students’ perceptions of the teacher’s intent is critical in the child’s learning process. Noguera’s (2004) study finds that students produce successful academic results and achievement when teachers demonstrate an empathetic attitude towards their students’ abilities, and also when students are challenged to meet high standards and expectations. Students in eight of the ten schools in Noguera’s study perceived that their teachers did not believe in their academic abilities. In the two other schools, one a pilot school and the other a charter, students were not only held accountable to meet high standards and expectations, they were required to submit a portfolio in their junior year, and a project in their senior year. Both schools focused on establishing a positive school culture and climate. As opposed to the eight other schools where instruction focused heavily on lecture and passive learning, the average student at these two schools scored at the proficient level, and all of the students passed the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exam. In addition, 93% of the students at the charter school, and 100% of the students at the pilot school felt that their teachers cared about their academic well-being, and that they had access to adults when they were experiencing personal problems (2004).

Closing the achievement gap between “European” White American students and students of color is one of the greatest challenges facing educators today (Bainbridge and Lasley, 2002). According to Schwartz (2001) all schools should promote and establish high expectations that all students can succeed and be encouraged to prepare for higher learning. She continues to state that schools should maintain a climate conducive to academic productivity where all students are given a sense of efficacy and empowerment
through academic exercises such as inquiry, seeking and using help, and learning. Howard (2010) adds, “It is essential that political and educational leaders have a sincere commitment to educating all students” (p. 34). Noguera (personal communication, March 10, 2012) states that although there are “pockets of excellence”, where public schools in America are focused on the interests and needs of all students, too many schools in this country are failing too many of our students. If the achievement gap is ever to be narrowed in America’s public school system, educators must find better ways of addressing the cultural complexities and demographics associated with the risk factors of Black and Latino students who come from poverty in order to truly address the needs of all students (Bainbridge and Lasley, 2002, p. 430).

Under President Obama’s administration, the U.S. Department of Education stepped up the attention on racial gaps in students’ college enrollment and success rates (Dillon, 2009). In order to truly increase graduation rates, college entry rates, improved college preparedness of students entering college, and college completion rates, the above mentioned concerns must be addressed and actions must be taken in order to decrease the achievement gap in public education (Carnoy, 1994; Howard, 2010; Low, 2011). Some factors that contribute to the achievement gap in education are not a result of the schools or teachers but instead caused by more subtle environmental factors and “opportunity gaps” in the resources available to poor versus wealthy children. Being raised in a low-income family, for example, often means having fewer educational resources at home, in addition to poor health care and nutrition. Some of these factors will be discussed below.
Economic Challenges

Bainbridge and Lasley (2002) state, “Educators and educational reformers who focus on systemic reform or teacher quality without giving attention to social-environmental factors will continue to be frustrated by more failure than success… society must continue to address social and economic justice issues” (p. 430). Ladson-Billings (2006) indicates that different researchers and educators attribute the gaps in achievement to a variety of causes ranging from the nature of the curriculum and the school to pedagogical practices of teachers. In order to decrease these gaps in achievement, Ladson-Billings believes that students should be granted more equitable opportunities in schools regardless of their socio-economic status or cultural diversity. Hamm Forell (2006) states that although students in schools are treated “equally” in terms of their access to particular resources and instruction, they are not treated “equitably,” recognizing their diverse needs in unique ways to curricula and instruction (p. 30). She emphasizes the importance of a child’s home and community values and experiences, and aligning them with the curriculum. Research strongly urges that educational reformers and school officials must acknowledge the economically disadvantaged as well as the culturally diverse student populations and incorporate the necessary changes to improve the curriculum and pedagogical practices of teachers (Bainbridge and Lasley, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Hamm Forell, 2006; Howard, 2010; Kopano, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Linton and Singleton, 2006; Low, 2011, Petchauer, 2009, Stoval, 2006, Zeichner, Melnick, & Gomez, 1996). Examples of these factors are discussed below.
Unfortunately, as discussed earlier with regard to the deficit model, many teachers perceive that students who come from low Socio-Economic Status (SES) families have less promising futures (Auwarter, 2008; Howard, 2010; Stovall, 2006). To better understand teacher perceptions of low-income students of color who might be facing some challenges outside of school in relation to their achievement, we must further understand and explore the challenges of coping with financial injustices, as well as the cultures in which these students come from. According to the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), the poverty level in the United States increased from 13.3% of the population in 2005 to 15.3% in 2010. In 2010 over 46,215,956 people living in the United States lived in poverty, that’s 3,347,793 more than the previous year. The National Poverty Center (2011) and the United States Bureau of the Census (2010) state that in 2010, 27.4% of Black families and 26.6% of Latino families living in the United States lived in poverty, as opposed to 9.9% of White families. Children under the age of 18 living in poverty have increased from 18.5% in 2005 to 21.6% in 2010.

According to Innovations for Poverty Action (ipa) (2010), approximately 12,000,000 children who attend urban public schools come from poverty. Bainbridge and Lasley (2002) indicate that schools where 25% or more of the student body are living in poverty, the entire student body overall, whether a poor or affluent overall student population, tend to not do so well compared to students from schools in predominantly affluent communities. Bainbridge and Lasley (2002) add that children who are living in poverty usually means their families are less likely to afford good health care, to secure nutritious food, or to provide enriching educational experiences for their children, all of which are essential preconditions for students to sustain success in school.
Teacher Perceptions

Research suggests that rather than acting on any negative perceptions, teachers should find alternative methods to improve student achievement, as well as increasing students’ “pro-school” attitudes. Hopkins (1999) offers the following suggestions: (a) teachers should open their classroom for their students in order to provide a space for students to feel welcomed, comfortable and seek additional support; (b) teachers should continually praise students’ success during instruction; and (c) teachers should communicate their expectations with their students in order to be much more effective in producing greater success in the academic abilities of their students. Studies have shown that minority students from low SES schools produce better academic performance if the teacher has a higher achievement motivation towards them and understands their “cultural uniqueness.” For example, Ford & Harris (1996) conducted a study of 148 Black public school students transitioning into a secondary school in an urban area in Ohio. They found that the Black students in their study strongly support principles of an achievement ideology and counseling that focuses on self-awareness that helps to close or narrow what the students believe regarding achievement. The students also indicated that they had a desire for their teachers to have an understanding of their cultural uniqueness, and incorporate more of their cultural differences into the curriculum. Eighty three percent of the students assessed in the study indicated that their teachers play a key role in their success, and 97% reported that they do much better academically when their teachers truly understand them. Consistent with other research, these findings appear to suggest the motivating power of teachers and their positive effect on student learning (Delpit, 1991; Hopkins, 1999; Howard, 2010; Niebuhr and Niebuhr, 1999).
According to Delpit (1991), teacher education usually focuses on research that links failure and socioeconomic status, and failure and cultural differences. Delpit asserts that it is hard to believe that children of color who come from low-income families can possibly be academically successful after their teachers have been so thoroughly exposed to so much negative indoctrination (1991). Howard (2010) states that when teachers lack the necessary training and competence to effectively teach students from diverse groups, there will be varying degrees of misunderstandings between the students and their teachers. Kati Hayock, president of The Education Trust in Washington DC, states that in order to close the achievement gap and increase the achievement levels of low-income students of color, we need to focus on “what matters,” which includes good teachers (2001). Her study, based on data from standard national sources including the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), as well as six years of observations in high poverty classrooms across the country, unfortunately finds that when teachers are questioned about their low-income students of color, too many of them respond that “they’re too poor to learn” and “their parents do not care about their child’s education.” As a result, Haycock states, “We (teachers) take the students who have less to begin with and systematically give them less in school” (2001, p. 3).

Research suggests that teachers should be more welcoming of their students’ abilities and input. Delpit (1991, 2006) states that if we do not have some knowledge of children’s lives outside of the realms of paper-and-pencil work, and even outside of their classrooms, then we cannot know their strengths. She adds that not knowing students’ strengths leads to our “teaching down” to children from communities that are culturally
different from that of the teachers in the school. This line of research suggests that rather than challenging students’ abilities in order for them to apply their full academic potential, too often educators simplify the workload for poor students of color—thinking and believing that they are doing them (poor students of color) and the educational system a favor (Delpit, 2006; Howard, 2010).

There is an overabundant amount of research that has uncovered the damaging effects that low expectations can have on students’ academic performance (Avery & Walker, 1993; Howard, 2010; Irvine & York, 1993; Tettegah, 1996). According to Schwartz (2001) all schools should promote and establish high expectations so that all students can succeed at equal levels and be encouraged to prepare for higher learning. She continues to state that schools should maintain a climate conducive to academic productivity where students are given a sense of efficacy and empowerment through academic exercises, such as inquiry, seeking and using help, and learning. In a two year grounded theory study on the conflict and tension urban high school seniors experience in school in the north eastern area of the United States, Low (2011) found that students felt teachers have the perception that they do not have the abilities to succeed; therefore they act on lowered expectations by decreasing student workload and learning. Through observations, “on-the-fly” interviews and formal in-depth interviews, and both audio and video recordings of class sessions, Low found a common theme in the perceptions students had about teachers. Rather than challenging students to meet higher expectations, Low states that lowering expectations threatens teacher-student relationships, and damages any possibility of increasing student self-esteem (2011, p. 104). Howard (2010) asserts that it is critical that teachers internalize the belief that all
students, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, or ethnicity, are capable learners. He continues to add that teachers should not be sympathetic educators when attempting to transform low-income, students of color, but instead be empathetic. Based on a qualitative case study, which included 30 semi-structured interviews of elementary and secondary urban students in the Northwest and Midwest areas of the United States, Howard (2002), examined marginalized African American elementary and secondary students’ descriptions of teaching practices and learning environments within urban schools. Howard’s summary of his findings on the differences between sympathetic and empathetic teachers is framed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Characteristics of sympathetic and empathetic teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Sympathetic Educators</strong></th>
<th><strong>Empathetic Educators</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower expectations of students due to race, poverty, or language</td>
<td>Hold students accountable despite difficult circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See limitations in students</td>
<td>See promise and possibilities in students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See deficits in students</td>
<td>See assets in students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paralyzed by problems</td>
<td>Become active problem solvers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have narrow, limited teaching repertoire due to perceived student capacity</td>
<td>Develop critical and complex teaching practices to engage students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place little to no value on students’ perspectives or voices</td>
<td>Listen and learn from students’ experiences to inform teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View learning as a teacher-dominated practice, with students having little to offer</td>
<td>View learning as a reciprocal process between teacher and student</td>
</tr>
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In his study, Howard found that empathetic teachers, who understand the challenges that poverty poses for many students, often communicate a firm belief in the abilities of their students to their students. They listen to and learn from their students’ experiences and struggles, yet they continue to hold their students accountable for academic rigor.

Empathetic teachers find creative ways to expect and demand excellence, and as a result,
Howard finds that despite the circumstances in which these students come from, empathetic teachers help students attain success (2010).

When teachers do not understand the potential of the students they teach and when teachers don’t believe that their students can be academically successful, they will under-teach them no matter what the methodology (Delpit, 1991, 2006; Howard, 2010; Low, 2011).

The following section examines literature on culturally responsive teaching practices, as a way of examining and understanding the benefits that incorporating these practices could bring to urban secondary classrooms.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices**

**The Transformational Key to Reforming Education for the Ethnically Diverse Child**

Freire (1970, 1973) argues that when schools domesticate, they socialize students into accepting the ideology and values of society’s dominant class as legitimate. Freire (1970) refers to the educational practices in this country as the “banking method,” where teachers deposit knowledge to the students by means of a one-way conduit dialogue where the ideology and values of the dominant social class are transmitted to the student. Noguera (2004) agrees, stating that schools often rely heavily on lecture, which leads to passive learning. In several studies conducted in secondary urban schools across this nation, researchers have found that students’ thoughts and ideas are not considered important enough to be included into the conversation; consequently students fully depend on the teachers for their acquisition of knowledge (Hamm Forell, 2006; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Morrell, 2002; Noguera, 2004; Petchauer, 2009; Stovall, 2006). Students are not acknowledged as willing and able participants whose views
should be considered in creating schools that need to forego the transformational process in order to become liberatory institutions (Noguera, 2004; Smith-Maddox and Solórzano, 2002). Educators have to learn about their students’ cultures and communities in order to establish a true transformation of teacher thinking (Ladson-Billings, 1994; 2009). Freire proposes a methodology to address the problems posed in three general phrases: (a) identify and name the social problem, (b) analyze the causes of the social problem, and (c) find solutions to the social problem (Freire, 1970, 1973). He refers to this concept as “problem-posing methodology.” Educators must first gather information by conducting research of the major issues and problems at the school setting, in this case identifying the cultural differences that potentially prevent low-income, students of color from achieving academic success. Once educators have collected data, the significant themes or problems must be coded. These codes will become critical for future dialogue among all the research participants. The codified themes will be analyzed and described in order to find the sources of the problems through the dialogue between the research participants. Finally, the research participants will collaborate with the teachers in finding solutions to the social problems in question. Smith-Maddox and Solórzano (2002) use the Freire’s problem-posing methodology to introduce an alternative instructional and pedagogical methodology in teacher education.

In order to change the status quo created through decades of teaching practices that have not improved academic achievement for low-income students of color, students must be taught in a multi-method, dialogical format (Smith-Maddox and Solórzano, 2002). Smith-Maddox and Solórzano argue that teacher candidates must unlearn their stereotypical knowledge of race, and instead analyze and theorize what it means to teach
students from a diverse population. Smith-Maddox and Solórzano taught a social foundation course to student teachers in a master's level university-based teacher education program that focused on cross-culture language and academic development and theoretical perspectives on the impact of economic structures, political arrangements, and deep-seated norms about race, class, cultural and language on the schooling and social opportunities for low-income minority students in U.S. schools. In order to challenge and examine student teachers’ longstanding assumptions, attitudes, beliefs and practices about schools, ethnically diverse communities, and their own knowledge of race and racism, student teachers in the course were required to conduct two case studies, the first on a secondary urban student and the second on a culturally diverse community. Through these asset-based community case studies, student teachers were given the opportunity to name problems, identify relations among the problem elements, and recombine the problem elements into new patterns of strategies and solutions. This helped the student teachers develop a pedagogy for social foundations that facilitates achieving its objectives. Smith-Maddox and Solórzano found - as a result of the student teachers engaging in the case studies - the following to be beneficial for educators when educating students from diverse backgrounds: (a) students must feel that their thoughts and ideas are important; (b) teachers should act more like facilitators allowing students to challenge the ideology and values of the dominant social class; and (c) teachers should gain an understanding as to why some of the standard forms of pedagogy are being questioned through the multi-method dialogue between the teacher and the students. Smith-Maddox and Solórzano (2002) state that students should be viewed as active agents engaged in the discovery and development of their own knowledge. They continue by adding that
teachers should view problems and differences as issues that can be resolved, rather than the issues being a reality that has to be accepted.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Teaching practices and the use of multicultural resources and materials that acknowledge and incorporate cultural heritages of different ethnic groups is referred to as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). The term CRP was first created by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) to describe “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impact knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (pp. 17-18). Howard (2010) describes CRP as:

> Culturally responsive pedagogy embodies a professional, political, cultural, ethical, and ideological disposition that supersedes mundane teaching acts; it is centered in fundamental beliefs about teaching, learning, students, their families, and their communities, and an unyielding commitment to see student success become less rhetoric and more of a reality. (p. 67)

When discussing the issue of improving the current state of education with the purpose and intention of developing strategies to narrow the achievement gap, educators must realize that traditional European teaching practices and the curriculum must be reformed, especially when attempting to improve the learning and academic progress of poor students of color (Bainbridge and Lasley, 2002; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Noguera, 2004). Racially and ethnically diverse students come to school with culturally influenced cognition, behavior, and dispositions that teachers must appreciate in order to maximize the learning experiences of their culturally diverse students (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Gay, 2000; Zeichner, Melnick, & Gomez, 1996). Culturally relevant teachers use cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of culturally
diverse students to create spaces of learning that are appropriate and effective (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2010). Culturally relevant teachers understand that diversity requires new approaches to the teaching craft. Fostering the full potential of students requires instruction that helps students connect with what they already know to what they need to know (Bainbridge and Lasley, 2002).

According to Ladson-Billings (1995), many anthropologists have given labels to what we consider CRP, including culturally appropriate, culturally congruent, culturally responsive, and culturally compatible. These labels have attempted to locate the problem of discontinuity between what students experience at home and what they experience at school in the speech and language interactions of teachers and students. Research states that if the languages the students speak at home are incorporated into the classroom, the students are more likely to experience academic success (Freeman & Freeman, 2001; Good, Masewicz, and Vogel, 2010; Krashen, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Piercynski, Matranga, and Peltier, 1997). Delpit (2006), states that teachers are really the cultural brokers who have the opportunity to connect the familiar to the unknown. This “unknown” that Delpit speaks of are the culturally relevant, appropriate, congruent, responsive, and compatible experiences that children have prior to entering the classroom. These experiences that students are accustomed to at home might be unfamiliar to teachers, but these unfamiliar experiences provide teachers the perfect opportunity to not only learn about the cultural experiences and differences of their diverse ethnic population, but to also connect what children deem familiar with the speech, language, and curriculum in the classroom. Ladson-Billings (1995) provides three propositions or criteria to consider when analyzing what culturally relevant
pedagogy looks like: (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (p. 160).

One trend that continues in U.S. classrooms is, whereas the student populations grow increasingly diverse, the teaching population remains increasingly white (Low, 2011). Gay and Howard (2000) refer to this as the demographic divide, where teachers face the reality that they are most likely to teach students who are culturally, ethnically, linguistically, racially, and socially different than them. According to the National Educational Association (NEA), as of 2006, 85% of the teachers in this country were White, while only 6% were Black. Latino teachers were grouped with teachers of Asian descent and other ethnic groups to comprise a minute 5%. The National Center for Education Information (NCEI) and the NEA state that the percentage of white teachers decreased from 90% in 2001, but the disparity in culturally, ethnically, linguistically, racially, and socially diverse teachers is still alarming. On the NEA website, it currently states: “The National Education Association believes that multiracial teaching staffs are essential to the operation of schools. The Association deplores the current trend of diminishing numbers of ethnic minority educators” (NEA, 2011). Howard (2010) agrees, stating that academic institutions must remain committed to establishing and maintaining a racial climate in schools that is conducive to racial equity. Villegas & Clewell (1998) state that it is important to increase the number of ethnic minority educators in urban public schools in order to break down stereotypical views of ethnically diverse students. Genzuk (1997) adds that minority teachers help synchronize home culture to school
culture. Ford, Grantham, & Harris (1997) agree, stating that minority teachers act directly and indirectly as “cultural translators” in the classroom (p. 214), and help students to make connections between their cultural backgrounds and the school system (Howard, J. 2010). In a study conducted by Brosnan (2002), when interviewed about the importance of having ethnically diverse teachers at a student of color conference, one student stated, “(We want teachers who) understand the complexities of our lives and the adjustments that we need to make in order to fit in here” (p. 12). Another student said of White teachers, “We want teachers to understand class issues – and not make assumptions about our family, where we are from, our income, etc.” (p. 12). In another study analyzing existing data from 11,600 students, Dee (2001) found consistent evidence to the educational benefits for black students as well as white students when assigned an “own-race teacher” (p. 22). When ethnic minority teachers teach culturally diverse students of color, the cultural connections can prove to have positive results in both student academic achievement and pro-school attitudes. Specifically, when ethnic minority teachers incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy, there is a sense of ownership to the content they are teaching their students.

According to Linton and Singleton (2006), it is critical to engage in Courageous Conversations about Race (CCR) in order to address and bring awareness to racial issues and disparities, inequities, White entitlement and privilege, and the restructuring of schools, classrooms, curricula, and relationships with students and families in ways that will improve student engagement and performance. Linton and Singleton state that these conversations are not being held in most schools for many reasons, mainly because of the fear of offending one another. These authors argue, as do Howard (2010) and Tatum
(2007), that fear of engaging in such discourse should be set aside, guidelines should be established, and these necessary conversations should be had so that people start accepting and appreciating the differences of other peoples’ cultures.

There are some schools that are making a difference when conversations about race are part of the school culture and such discourse is the norm. Howard (2010) spent a total of 1,000 hours during a two year span from 2007 – 2009 at four different schools in Los Angeles observing professional developments and classrooms, interviewing teachers and administrators, attending after-school programs, events, and staff meetings, and engaging in the day-to-day operations of the school (p. 133). Two of the schools were elementary schools, one was a middle school, and the other was a high school. What Howard found were those principals who are actively engaged in the school culture, frequently visited classrooms, and engaged his/her staff in conversations about race exhibited intense and persistent efforts to promote academic achievement (p. 134). The principals at these schools viewed themselves as “instructional leaders.” They were out of their offices watching teachers teach, roaming the campus making sure that none of the students were out of their classes, and regularly engaging in conversations with their students. All four principals encouraged their teachers to engage in conversations about the racial disparities in the academic outcomes of their students. The visionary leadership, effective teaching practices, intensive academic interventions, explicit knowledge of race, and parental and community engagement were the essential factors that led to the overall academic success at the four schools (Howard, 2010).

Schools must be structured to offer rich programs and create new approaches to enhance student “intellectual capital” and to create instructional practices that address the
inherent diversity of students of color from poor urban communities (Bainbridge and Lasley, 2002). CRP and culturally responsive pedagogy is becoming more comprehensible, as a shift from conceptual theory to grounded practice has become more evident in some schools across this country (Howard, 2010). Empirical studies incorporating CRP by Civil and Khan (2001), Parsons (2005), and Lynn (2006) have all demonstrated an improvement in student’s core academic disciplines when CRP’s are practiced.

Civil and Khan (2001) refer to culturally relevant instruction as a teaching practice that links experiences of a students’ home life to school. In a study analyzing the mathematics instruction developed from a “Garden Theme,” Civil and Khan observed gardening experiences of 4th and 5th grade students to the schools mathematics curriculum. The researchers found that linking the cultural experiences of the students to the learning practices at school enhanced students’ confidence in the understanding of mathematical content. Civil and Khan conclude that culturally relevant instruction empowers children to advance in required mathematics programs (p. 405).

Parsons (2005) conducted a qualitative study of elementary school students at a school in the Southeastern part of the United States. The 4th grade classroom she observed was comprised of 11 Black students and 11 White students, most of who were eligible for the free and reduced lunch program. Parsons observed for two hours at a time for several months, conducted semi-structured interviews, and concluded her methodology with a member check where the participants assessed the research data. The teacher in this study demonstrated culturally relevant “caring” and engaged students in honest and open-ended conversations about cultural differences. Obvious attempts to
incorporate culturally relevant caring enhanced the relationship between the teacher and
the students. Once the students were connected through this relationship, the teacher was
able to establish high expectations and helped students to meet those expectations. What
Parsons found was that when the teacher eradicated the “teacher is dominant”
philosophy, a space was created for students to learn. Also, Parsons noticed that the sense
of spirit and pride the students had in their academic abilities substituted remediation.
Finally, Parsons found that the teacher reinforced students’ competency, which was
evidenced by Black students in the class exercising and demonstrating their competency
by assisting their peers (p. 31).

Over the course of nine months, Lynn (2006) explored culturally relevant
teaching practices of five Black male teachers in South Central Los Angeles who
incorporate CRP in public urban schools. The majority of the student population in the
classrooms was low socioeconomic Black students eligible for free and reduced lunch.
Two of the schools were elementary schools, one a middle school, and the other a high
school. Through the systematic observation and interviews of the Black male teachers in
their natural settings, teachers provided deep personal narratives about their beliefs about
schools and teaching and learning in culturally diverse urban communities. All the
teachers in this study reported on the importance of and their commitment to culturally
relevant teaching practices. Two of the teachers stated that culturally relevant pedagogy
could simply mean giving children a space to be heard, providing them with a shoulder to
lean on, and giving the children a space where they could learn complex ideas on their
own terms and in their own language (p. 2518). The teachers felt, as Black men, they
could relate their own experiences with oppression to understand the students’ daily
struggles with race and class oppression (p. 2518). The teachers agreed that when classrooms incorporate CRP into the instruction, students find the classroom to be a safe space where they could push toward excellence (p. 2517).

These examples support the necessity for teachers to understand and appreciate the diverse backgrounds and cultures that students of color bring with them to school on a daily basis. Once teachers and students establish a cultural understanding of one another’s differences, teachers need to then find ways of incorporating culturally relevant pedagogical practices in their classrooms. Successful teachers who incorporate CRP are not dependent on state curriculum or textbooks to decide what and how to teach (Ladson-Billings, 1995). One form of CRP is the introduction and incorporation of Hip Hop within the curriculum. As more and more urban students of color identify with Hip Hop music and the Hip Hop culture, an increasing number of educators across the country have begun to incorporate Hip Hop within the curriculum as a way of engaging this student population in their learning with the hope of closing the achievement gap. The following sections provide a brief overview of the history of Hip Hop, the relevance and importance of Hip Hop as a cultural force that many children in low-income urban communities can relate to, and examples of some findings when Hip Hop was incorporated into the curriculum of urban secondary schools.

**Hip Hop Roots**

In the 1970s, poverty, corruption, gang violence, drug abuse, school dropout rates, police brutality, homelessness, crime, and the gap in education achievement increased in the inner cities of the five boroughs in New York (Chang, 2005; Gonzalez, 2004; Hager, 2004). This was most evident in Bronx, NY, where in addition to the issues the city was
facing; over 10,000 workers went out of business (Gonzalez, 2004). After experiencing a life changing breakthrough, Kevin Donovan (aka Afrika Bambaataa), former leader of the Black Spades, a notorious gang from the Bronx River Housing Projects, introduced Hip Hop to the world as a positive art form, ultimately allowing a temporary escape from the problems the youth faced in the streets or, as it is said, the concrete jungle (Chang, 2005; Light, 1999; Ogg, 1999). Established on the foundation of peace, unity, love, and having fun, Hip Hop described the issues facing inner city folk living in poverty. Melle Mel, an emcee from the group *Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five*, describes in the song, “The Message” (1981):

> Broken glass everywhere, people pissing on the stairs, you know they just don’t care. I can’t take the smell, I can’t take the noise, got no money to move out I guess I got no choice. Rats in the front room, roaches in the back, junkies in the alley with the baseball bat. I tried to get away, but I couldn’t get far because the man with a tow truck repossessed my car…

> got a bum education, double-digit inflation, I can’t take the train to the job, there’s a strike at the station.

The original elements that comprise Hip Hop are graffiti art, the disc jockey (D.J.), the B-Boy (Break Boy), and the emcee (art, instruments, dance, and lyrics). It began in 1973 when Clive Campbell (Kool DJ Herc) set up DJ equipment at Cedar Park, on the corner of 179th Street and Cedar Avenue (Chang, 2005; Light, 1999; Ogg, 1999). He began to play music, spinning the breaks of records from soul, Disco, jazz, funk, and rock. Kids in the neighborhood, rather than causing havoc, would run to the park, listen, observe, dance, and have a blast. Dancing would replace fighting, and a decrease in violence was evident as gangs would transform into dance crews (Chang, 2005; Light, 1999). Hamm Forell (2006) states that through the use of rap rhymes and the Hip Hop life style, urban students of color are empowered to connect with their world, experiment
with language practices, and narrate the story of their own reality (p. 29). Knowledge reflected through experiences represented in Hip Hop lyrics engender discussions of esteem, power, place, and purpose, encouraging students to further their own knowledge and experiences of urban sociology and politics (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2002, p. 89). As opposed to participating in sports or other activities, dancing and rhyming did not entail the need for money, ultimately attracting more poor children to take part in the growing culture. Through rapping, children and adults now had a forum where they could voice their struggles and use their imagination to be creative literary geniuses (Chang, 2005; Gonzalez, 2004; Light, 1999). Almost 40 years later, and now under the control of corporate American influences, Hip Hop still incorporates meaningful messages or storytelling within its lyrics (Chang, 2005; Light, 1999).

**Resistance**

Hip Hop is often viewed by public perception as being negative, corruptive, destructive, and “thuggish” ultimately not belonging in schools (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Prier, 2012; Runell-Hall, 2011). Low (2011) states:

> Popular culture, and especially hip-hop, will always exist in some kind of tension with school culture, and schools are historically structured around white middle-class ideologies that can marginalize black and other minority youth, as well as youth from working class families or living in poverty (p. 75).

Those who are looking at Hip Hop from the outside might be resistant towards Hip Hop due to the expressions of sexism, racism, homophobia, violence, misogyny, and capital constructions to say the least (Baszile, 2009; Dyson, 2007). Metro-Roland (2010) attributes this resistance to the lack of cross-cultural understandings. “Much of the conflict between administrators, teachers, and students involved processes of
interpretation and misinterpretation around language, identity, and culture, and that these moments of conflict could be central to learning” (Low, 2011, p. xiii). As a result, Rose (1994) explains, “Anxieties of teachers and administrators about building relations between this youth-driven culture (Hip Hop) and school are understandable,” (p. 2). Low (2011) calls a need for attention:

The very reasons teachers and administrators might resist the deliberate introduction of hip-hop into the planned curriculum – the culture’s complex and contradictory politics of representation on issues such as gender, violence, sexuality, materialism, race, and language – are what make hip-hop so pedagogically vital (p. 1).

Forell (2006) agrees, stating that Hip Hop could be the key in engaging students to becoming active learners, but when some approach Hip Hop with a great deal of resistance they are conveying that Hip Hop poses some sort of threat; therefore “Silencing rap means silencing a perceived threat” (p. 31). Stone Hanley (2007) describes this threat as “Unconscious and conscious fears of Black males and the fear and shame of harboring those thoughts and feelings are reflected in many teachers’ biases against rap and Hip Hop” (p. 38). In Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop, Perry (2004) explains that this fear first became increasingly alarming to educators when white youth began identify with Hip Hop culture. Now that White youth were identifying with Hip Hop culture, the fear and resistance began to increase. Armstrong (2004) agrees stating, “In continuation of the long history of racist stereotyping in North America, the portrait of ‘rappers as violent criminals’ has been particularly appealing to the white audiences who remain a significant part of the buying audience for rap music” (p. 343). Price (2005) suggests that educators from older generations who criticize hip hop without
investigating the power and significance Hip Hop culture could contribute in schools are still trapped in stereotypes and biases.

Prier (2012), states, “If we don’t understand the particular context that shapes the production of cultural artifact’s or text’s meaning, there is the potential of misrepresenting what message is being conveyed or communicated to the public” (p. 200). In order for educators to understand the power of Hip Hop, they must first have an understanding of Hip Hop (Dimitriadis, 2001; Dyson, 2007; Giroux, 1996; Hamm Forell, 2006; Koza, 1999; Low, 2011; Morrell, 2002; Perchauer, 2009; Prier, 2012).

**Hip Hop and Education**

“Hip Hop is the single most influential cultural force shaping contemporary urban youth in the United States” (Low, 2011, p. viii). Morrell (2002) affirms that popular culture provides a powerful and logical connection between the lived experiences of urban youth and school culture. Hip Hop has become that “powerful connection” to the field of education because of its implications for understanding language, learning, identity, and curriculum (Petchauer, 2009). Stovall (2006), states that urban high school teachers can use Hip Hop, as it is so relevant to the lives of so many low-income students of color, to bridge ideas and tasks that promote critical thinking.

Michael Eric Dyson, professor of sociology at Georgetown University, has authored many books on popular culture. As a scholar and avid supporter of Hip Hop and the incorporation of Hip Hop in the classroom, he has thoroughly analyzed the Hip Hop culture and in his book, *Know What I Mean?* (2007) he explains that: “The methodologies of examining Hip Hop are borrowed from sociology, politics, religion, economics, urban studies, journalism, communications, theory, American studies,
transatlantic studies, black studies, history, musicology, comparative literature, English, linguistics, and other disciplines” (p. xxvii). His purpose is to illustrate that the context in which Hip Hop comes from can be used, taught, and discussed in most disciplines already being taught in schools and universities. Giroux (1996), for example, argues that educators must incorporate popular culture as an educational element, stating that Hip Hop is a serious site for social knowledge that should be incorporated in classrooms, discussed, interrogated, and critiqued (p. 28). Hamm Forell (2006) reminds educators that “rap is a legitimate literacy tool with the added benefit that it addresses the social, economic, and political position that today’s students occupy” (p. 30). Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2002) state that Hip Hop in the form of literary text can foster literary interpretations which are rich in imagery and metaphors that teachers can use to not only teach irony, tone, diction and point of view, but also use Hip Hop as a bridge linking “the streets” to the “world of academics” (p. 89).

**Hip Hop in Use**

Hip Hop as a form of music and culture is often devalued by the education system (Dimitriadis, 2001; France, 1994; Gilyard, 1996). It is seen as a “worthless endeavor,” that provides absolutely no use for the enhancement of written expression or the academic improvement of students; but research has shown that it can create a space for students to make valuable contributions in the classroom (Dimitriadis, 2001; France, 1994; Gilyard, 1996; Hamm Forell, 2006; Perchauer, 2009). K. Leigh Hamm Forell, Academic Advisor and Coordinator of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives at NC State University, has researched and piloted her own research integrating Hip Hop into the curriculum. Hamm Forell (2006) has found that high school students who engage with
Hip Hop in the classroom significantly increase their knowledge of how to deconstruct, remap, and improve their written skills, expand their semantic realms, explore the worlds of symbolism, and investigate orthographic and dialectic representations of words. In a study conducted by Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2002), high school seniors in Los Angeles compared and contrasted canonical poets with songs by certain Hip Hop artists. They found that the critical pedagogy situated with the experiences of the students created critical dialogue and critical engagement of the text, where the students were able to relate the texts to larger social and political issues (p. 91). Duncan-Andrade & Morrell stated that “the students (were) not only actively engaged in the lessons, they also have fun learning about a culture and genre of music that they had great familiarity” (2002, p. 91). Perchauer (2009) adds that studies have implied that Hip Hop based education is successful if students enjoy and are engaged in the process. Duncan-Andrade & Morrell ultimately established goals in their research that: (a) utilized students’ involvement with Hip Hop to scaffold their critical and analytical skills; (b) provided students with the awareness and confidence needed to transfer these skills onto canonical texts; and (c) enabled students to critique messages of popular culture media.

Dr. Greg Dimitriadis, professor, scholar, and author of such books as Performing Identity / Performing Culture: Hip Hop as Text, Pedagogy, and Lived Practice states, “The impulse to understand the lives of young people as they enter our classrooms is very much an unfulfilled one” (2009, p. xviii). What he is referring to is not how young, urban students of color, relate to Hip Hop, but how teachers are not bringing these students’ lived experiences through the Hip Hop culture into the classrooms. He encourages teachers to use Black popular culture, Hip Hop in this case, as a resource to engage
students in “complex literacy activities” (p. 50). In conducting his study on the effects of Hip Hop pedagogies in urban communities, working with one group of middle school level students and one group of high school level students, he found that students can produce clear connections to identity and the understanding of what it means to be both Black and youth of color in a marginalized society (p. 157). Through Hip Hop instruction, students were able to make sense of their lives, build relationships, and construct a sense of place, identity, and history (Low, 2011, p.18). Dimitriadis urges educators to expand the traditional notion of school curricula in order to understand the deeply embedded and vulnerable feelings that many low-income children from urban communities struggle with today (like survival, fear, and personal loss). He feels that the school system continues to distance themselves from the broader social, cultural, and material realities that these children know to believe. Dimitriadis states, “Curricular knowledge has been disconnected from the everyday lives, needs, and concerns (of students of color in public education)” (p. 162).

Author, activist, and professor at Columbia University, Dr. Marc Lamont Hill, states that Hip Hop as a form of CRP reflects the alternative vision that considers the relationship among students, teachers, text, schools, and the broader social world (2009). Hill feels that incorporating Hip Hop as a form of CRP will become the hook that captures the attention of students, facilitating rich and complicated conversations about language, culture, and identity (p. 4). Hill strongly urges educational institutions to incorporate Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE) in secondary literature classrooms in order to create spaces of both voice and silence, where students are empowered and able to deploy symbols, styles, and practices that are marginalized in others classes. Hill
believes that HHBE should include texts that are political, intellectual, and culturally sophisticated and relevant. He proposed that Hip Hop Literature classes follow six particular themes: (a) literature, (b) love, (c) family, (d) the “hood,” (e) politics, and (f) despair. In his study, he found that students connected with narrative texts. Once the students were able to write their own personal narratives, they felt that writing their narratives was an insightful task, a relief from the traditional norm, supportive and empathetic to their needs, and helped them to heal their personal and ideological wounds. Hill states, “By linking the curriculum to the lived realities of students, particularly those from marginalized groups, we position ourselves to hear stories that are often difficult to hear and even more difficult to tell” (p. 96). These were similar to the experiences and findings conducted in the studies of Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, Dimitriadis, and Howard. Once again we see successful results when incorporating a Hip Hop pedagogy, and linking the lived experiences of these poor urban students of color to the lessons, instruction, and tasks.

The research on the effects of Hip Hop within the curriculum in relation to improved academic achievement within public education continues to grow. Increasing number of researchers, authors, and scholars continue to publish journal articles, books, and dissertations on the topic. The Hip-Hop Center for Research and Teaching at New York University estimates that there are well over three hundred courses on Hip Hop offered at colleges and universities across the country (Runell Hall, 2011). Universities now host Hip Hop conferences - UCLA being the first in 1999 - lecture tours, festivals, and student run showcases. Several universities, including Carleton College in Minnesota, Howard University in D.C., and University of California, Berkley now offer
Hip Hop as a minor. Many of the college and university students, faculty and staff who attend or participate in the above mentioned Hip Hop courses or events across this country are continuing to add to the existing research on Hip Hop’s influence on the academy. Although research on the effects of a Hip Hop based curriculum for low-income students of color in relation to academic achievement and student motivation does exist and continues to grow, the research constitutes only a small percentage of the full body of research on improved academic achievement for this student population; therefore there is still the need for further research. This study hopes to add to the existing body of research on Hip Hop instruction.

**Summary**

This review of the literature has acknowledged the disparities in the achievement gap between Black and Latino students and their White counterparts in the United States that continue to exist despite the efforts of No Child Left Behind. Although there are “pockets of excellence”, where schools have focused their attention on the culturally diverse complexities associated with Black and Latino students who come from low-income families, all public schools in America need to focus on the interests and needs of all students who attend public schools. The literature states that America’s graduation rates and college entry rates need to increase. The economic challenges students and their family’s face that create a barrier to improving academic achievement of Black and Latino students need to be addressed. Almost all of the literature agrees teachers’ perceptions of a student’s lack of ability or achievement should not attribute failure to race, ethnicity, cultural differences or socioeconomic status. Instead, teachers should take the economically disadvantaged and culturally diverse students’ needs into consideration.
when incorporating the necessary changes to improve the curriculum and pedagogical practices of teachers. The literature urges educators to understand and appreciate the cultural differences of their students, and to increase the expectations of low-income Black and Latino students while challenging their abilities in order for them to apply their full academic potential, and encouraging and motivating them to succeed.

The literature suggests educators need to consider the use of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) as a way to improve the academic achievement of low-income Black and Latino students. Using cultural referents to empower students’ intellectuality, social, emotional, and political knowledge skills and attitudes could lead to improved academic performance in schools. The literature finds that incorporating Hip Hop as a form of CRP can create a powerful and logical connection between the lived experiences of urban students to school culture. Although there are a growing number of studies and literature on the use of Hip Hop as a form of CRP, there is still a void in making true connections between Hip Hop as a form of CRP and the direct connection it has to student academic achievement and student motivation. Using a qualitative design – exploring the experiences and perceptions of teachers through in-depth interviews - this study will seek to further explore the effects of incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum of urban secondary schools in relation to the academic achievement and student motivation of low-income Black and Latino students.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the perceptions and experiences of teachers who incorporate Hip Hop within the curriculum during instruction in low-income urban secondary schools. Specifically, this study will examine to what extent teachers perceive their experiences have increased student motivation and academic achievement among low-income urban secondary school students. This study also seeks to address the potential educational benefits that incorporating popular culture – Hip Hop in this case – within the curriculum could have towards addressing the achievement gap in public, low-income urban high schools.

There are many teachers across this country who are using Hip Hop within the curriculum. Hamm Forell (2006) states, “Using hip-hop in the classroom empowers youth to become active partners in education rather than mere spectators” (p. 33). The questions I have posed in this study were geared towards those teachers who have had experience and knowledge of the Hip Hop culture, and have already incorporated Hip Hop based instruction into the curriculum in their classrooms. The following were the key research questions in this study:

1. What experiences have teachers had when incorporating Hip Hop based instruction within the curriculum in low-income urban secondary schools?
2. What do teachers who use Hip Hop based instruction within the curriculum perceive to be the benefits (if any) related to student motivation in low-income urban secondary school students?
3. What do teachers who use Hip Hop based instruction within the curriculum
perceive to be the benefits (if any) related to student academic achievement in low-income urban secondary school students?

This chapter will identify and describe the research design for my study, the research setting and context where my study took place, the research sample and data sources I observed and analyzed for my study, the instruments and procedures I used for my research, the data collection as well as the analysis of the data, and my roles as a researcher.

**Research Design or Tradition**

This case study is framed within an interpretivist research paradigm. Glesne (2011) describes this paradigm as an idealist approach that focuses on independent ideas that holistically combine parts together to form the whole. This multiple case study was conducted borrowing the principles of ethnography in order to describe and interpret a cultural and social group. Given this study’s purpose, I used an ethnographic research tradition where through interviews I accessed participants’ interpretations of (this) social phenomenon. Glesne (2011) affirms that this will lead to having a better understanding of human (teacher) ideas, actions, and interactions in specific contexts or in terms of the wider culture (p. 8). This study incorporated the experiences of teachers from multiple case studies conducted at different times and at various demographic locations across the greater Los Angeles area. As an ethnographic researcher, some basic assumptions for my study were:

- Using Hip Hop based instruction in low-income public urban secondary schools increase student motivation.
• Using Hip Hop based instruction in low-income public urban secondary schools improves students’ academic achievement.

• Using Hip Hop based instruction in low-income public urban secondary schools improves student engagement in learning.

This case study approach involves a comprehensive description of the setting(s), participants, and teacher interviews (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008) in order to provide findings that indicate that teacher perceptions, through their experiences, implicate that there are (or are not) improvements in the educational achievements of the low-income students of color these teachers have encountered while using Hip Hop based instruction. Through the use of the research tradition of ethnography, Glesne (2011) states that through interviews, the researcher will describe how people within a cultural group construct and share meaning. The methods of acquiring data to support the findings and implications were based on interviews of teachers at the various urban secondary schools across the greater Los Angeles area. The narratives from the teacher interviews as my form of data collection method should provide enough data that clearly establishes common perceptions of all the participants as to the advantages/disadvantages and successes/failures of incorporating Hip Hop based curriculum in the public urban classroom.

In conducting and investigating this research process, it was crucial that the participants, urban secondary school teachers in this case, be based in secondary schools that are located in low-income, urban communities with a prominently high population of students of color – Black and Latino in particular.
In my investigation of the meaning and description of how people within a cultural group construct and share meaning of a particular phenomenon, I will discuss the perceptions teachers have using a culturally relevant curriculum that indicate that it is beneficial and worthy of further exploration. Through the narratives of teacher interviews of the interactions they’ve had with their low-income urban students, I have provided genuine authentic findings that truly exemplify the experiences of teachers and their students as successful or unsuccessful. The interviews elaborated on specific detailed interactions and experiences that these teachers have had that have provided essential and meaningful data in describing their attitudes on the benefits or failures of incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum and instruction.

**Research Setting / Context**

The sites in which I conducted my research were based in urban communities throughout the greater Los Angeles area. I conducted teacher interviews at low-income urban secondary schools. The urban secondary schools had a predominantly large population of Black and Latino students, where 70% or more of the student population were Black and/or Latino, and at least a minimum of 70%, came from low socio-economic status families who participate in the Free and Reduced Lunch program. It was critical that my ethnographic research be conducted in these urban communities - as I sought to find meaning and understandings of these cultural groups - because it targeted the low-income students of color that the teachers I interviewed work with on a daily basis.

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is the second largest district in the nation serving 671,648 students in 1092 schools across four local districts. The
current average API score for the district is 745. Just as in most other districts across the nation with a large percentage of urban schools, the students with the lowest performing scores on standardized tests are English Language Learners (predominantly from the Latino population), Black students, students from low socioeconomic households, and students with disabilities. Many of the schools in LAUSD which are located in urban communities are currently under the restructuring process, not having met the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets set by the state. As the schools in Los Angeles continue to analyze, through professional developments, the actions taken by educators that have proven successful for students who are already meeting and passing the expectations on standardized tests, I hope that the research from my study provides the necessary findings on the impact culturally relevant pedagogical practices have on student motivation and academic achievement.

Even though my research is ethnographic in nature, my focus was on the experiences of teachers. Through networking at educational conferences and pre-emptive educational conferences in Oakland, New York, and Los Angeles, I had made contacts with teachers who were recently using Hip Hop based instruction within the curriculum or teachers who have used Hip Hop based instruction within the curriculum in their respective urban secondary schools. The teachers I have made contacts with at these conferences were my gate keepers as I searched for teachers who incorporated Hip Hop based instruction into their curriculum throughout the greater Los Angeles area where I conducted my study. In addition, I placed an advertisement in the Associated Administrators of Los Angeles (AALA) weekly newsletter announcing my study with the hope that administrators across LAUSD will either contact me personally, or have their
teachers who fall under the required criterion for my study contact me themselves. Both proved successful in finding the ten participants who took part in my study.

**Research Sample and Data Sources**

In studying teacher perceptions on the use of Hip Hop based curriculum at low-income urban secondary school settings, and how teachers perceive their experiences using a Hip Hop curriculum has affected their student’s’ motivation and academic achievement, the sample for my study came from urban secondary school teachers, both middle school and high school, who have been using Hip Hop based instruction with their lower SES students of color. The data I collected within my ethnographic qualitative study came from teacher interviews. I interviewed ten teachers who were using a Hip Hop curriculum during instruction.

Most interviews took place on the school campuses where I conducted my case studies. Several teachers felt more comfortable conducting interviews off campus; therefore we made arrangements and scheduled the interviews to more suitable locations. During the interviews, I elicited in-depth, context-rich personal accounts of experiences (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008), and teacher perceptions of the effects and outcomes of those experiences. All the interviews were semi-structured as questions arose during the course of these interviews (Glesne, 2011).

Predetermined by myself, the researcher, a criterion strategy was created where each participant interviewed had to meet the criteria prior to conducting the interviews. To truly grasp the construct and shared meaning of the effects on the cultural group my study is based on, the participants had to meet the following criteria:
• All participants had to have had at least one year experience using Hip Hop within the curriculum during instruction.

• All participants had to have had their teaching experiences and instruction take place at low-income urban secondary schools with poor students of color, primarily Black and Latino students, particularly when incorporating Hip Hop within the instruction.

• All participants had to be willing volunteers in order to truly conduct interviews that would produce authentic and trustworthy findings.

In order to truly fulfill the purpose behind my study, it was crucial to conduct interviews with participants who have worked with students from low-income urban secondary schools for at least one year. It was preferable that the participants had longer experiences working at urban secondary schools so that the participants truly knew and understood what it meant to work with students from such demographics, as well as knowing the struggles and challenges these students face on a daily basis. It is also important that the participants openly and willingly volunteer to be part of the study in order to get the most authentic and trustworthy responses. Finally, it was preferable that the participants had a true understanding and appreciation for the Hip Hop culture. Sebastein Elkouby (personal communication, April 10, 2011), a teacher in Los Angeles, stated that one who does not have a true understanding and appreciation for Hip Hop, and one who has not experienced or lived the culture of Hip Hop cannot simply be educated and learn about Hip Hop culture and history and be expected to make dramatic improvements in student motivation or academic achievement, or expected to establish meaningful connections and relationships with the students they are teaching. Although I
did not establish criterion for teachers in relation to how long they have been part of the Hip Hop culture, or how deep their understanding of the Hip Hop culture was, through purposeful selection of participants, I selected eight out of ten teachers who truly understood and appreciated the culture of Hip Hop. Being forced to use any form of CRP within the curriculum without truly knowing or appreciating the cultural relevance behind it might not produce authentic findings and results; therefore the teachers who I selected for my study who use Hip Hop within the curriculum knew and truly understood the Hip Hop culture, and were able to properly utilize the potential assets that incorporating this form of CRP provides during instruction. Dr. Alan Sitomer is a professor in the Graduate School of Education at Loyola Marymount University. He co-authored the book *Hip Hop Poetry and the Classics for the Classroom* which he uses to train teachers on how to incorporate Hip Hop within the curriculum in the Master’s program in a course entitled *Trends in the Teaching of Secondary Education*. Teachers who take this course do not always enter the class having a vast amount of knowledge or experience with Hip Hop music or Hip Hop culture, but the course does in fact prepare teachers to properly incorporate Hip Hop within the curriculum in their classrooms. The two other teachers in my study who did not have an extensive history as fans of Hip Hop have taken Dr. Sitomer’s course. This is one example of an exception to the above mentioned importance of having experience or knowledge of Hip Hop prior to incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum in urban classrooms. Although it is not expected that the use of any form of CRP will magically produce positive effects on student achievement or motivation, regardless of the demographics being taught, it is important that those using
particular forms of CRP understand the subject matter and materials they are incorporating in their classrooms or schools.

After making contacts across this country through personal interactions, conferences that I’ve attended and lived experiences I have had both as a teacher and out-of-the classroom personnel, and with teachers and administrators who use CRP within the curriculum at urban secondary schools, particularly Hip Hop, through emails and phone calls, I first contacted various teachers in LAUSD for voluntary participation of interviews. This was conducted under the approval of the California State University, Northridge Institutional Review Board (IRB), who ensured that ethical research was being conducted during the dissertation process at the university, as well as the LAUSD Research Unit.

Participants who were willing to participate in the interviews were screened by a telephone conversation prior to the study in order to determine if they met that above criterion. Once all participants were selected, I made the necessary arrangements and scheduled the interviews at their respective schools. I conducted interviews with ten teachers total at urban schools in LAUSD and the greater Los Angeles area.

**Ethical Issues**

Ethical issues connected to this study included protecting participants’ identity and ensuring that ethical standards were met. Steps taken to conduct an ethical study included:

- Selecting a convenient location for participants
- Selecting a setting that provides privacy for participants
- Selecting a nonthreatening environment for participants
• Being a good listener and minimizing my opinions, perceptions, or feelings
• Being sensitive and empathetic to participants
• Assigning pseudonym to each participant
• Disguising any identifiable characteristics, such as grade or school

In accordance with federal regulations, I submitted my proposal for this research study to the California State University, Northridge IRB for approval to ensure it complied with all requirements; as well as submitting any necessary human subjects approval required for the site.

**Instruments and Procedures**

**Research Invitation and Informed Consent Form**

A research invitation was sent to various teachers in Los Angeles who utilize or had utilized Hip Hop instruction, all of whom taught in low-income urban secondary schools. The research invitation described the purpose of the study, as well as outlining the steps that the participants had to take during the process. The research invitation also stated that participation was voluntary, confidential, and at any time, the participants could have chosen to cease their participation in the research.

An informed consent form was distributed to all participants, signed by all participants, and collected from all participants. The informed consent form outlines the study’s purpose, participation steps, potential risks, potential benefits, non-payment, audio recording procedures, confidentiality procedures, uses of data, withdrawal ability, identity of researcher, and rights of participants. Copies of the research invitation and the informed consent form can be found in the Appendix.
Interview Protocol

My data collection procedure included interview protocols used to conduct semi-structured interviews with the teachers who had been observed using Hip Hop within the curriculum with students of color in their low-income urban secondary school classrooms. The interview questions stemmed from the broader research questions in order to explore the perceptions these teachers had about potential student motivation and academic achievement. During the actual interviews, I asked probing questions to delve deeper and explore the perceptions of the participants.

The one-on-one interviews began with an introduction, followed by stating the study’s purpose and a reminder about confidentiality and informed consent. The interview protocol can be found in the Appendix.

Data Collection

In the spring of 2012, after my proposal hearing, I sent invitations to teachers in Los Angeles who were teaching in classrooms where Hip Hop was incorporated within the curriculum at their respective low-income urban secondary schools. I advertised my study in the Associated Administrators of Los Angeles (AALA) newsletter. Participants who responded were screened by phone conversations in order to analyze if they qualify for participation and meet the entire criterion. Teachers who identified as meeting the expectations for the study were contacted in the summer of 2012, after my dissertation proposal, and we arranged the best times to conduct the interviews. The interviews were conducted during the fall of 2012.
Data Analysis

Preliminary Data Analysis

I first extracted potential codes and themes from the literature review on current issues facing the state of education in the United States, as well as Hip Hop as a form of CRP. I then gathered my data in order to excogitate the data to make sense of the information supplied by the participants (Creswell, 2005), and finally I made connections from the literature on Hip Hop as a form of CRP to my ten interviews.

Interview Transcriptions

I conducted teacher interviews where I personally transcribed each interview. As I began the transcription for each interview, I looked for codes and themes from the questions in order to make connections of possible key-words and phrases from one interviewee to the rest of the interviewees. I explicated and clarified the codes, collapsed them into themes for the purposes of generating a general sense of ideas and thoughts that teachers had about incorporating Hip Hop in the curriculum as a form of CRP. After compiling a network of codes and themes, I interpreted the findings and results from my data analysis. The process of transcription, coding, collapsing the data into themes took two months to complete.

Role of the Researcher

As a qualitative researcher I engaged in the diligent and systematic inquiry and interpretation of – while remaining conscious of my multiple roles. As these roles varied from researcher to a curious learner (Glesne, 2011), I constantly reflected on the procedures and findings - as they may have related to my own biases - in order to not affect the authenticity and trustworthiness of the research.
As the principal investigator I was in charge of planning the ethnographical study. With the support, guidance, and approval of my dissertation chair, I identified a problem, designed the study where I prepared research questions, and finally executed the study in order to collect, interpret, and report my findings. It was important to remember that during the research process, I had to constantly remind myself that I am also a learner. Glesne (2011) warns us to not take the “expert” role or think that we are in a position of “authority.” As a researcher, I was in the field to attentively observe and listen.

As a researcher I was aware that I would be entering various settings and environments with personal beliefs, biases, and assumptions. Recognizing these personal and professional biases prior to, and during my research, was crucial for the authenticity and trustworthiness of my collection and interpretation of data (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). I needed to consider subjectivity at all times in order to not taint, distort, skew, transform, misconstrue, or shape (Peshkin, 1988) data collected during my study. By creating subjective “I’s” during the research process, I was consciously and acutely aware of distinguishing objective results.

I am currently employed as a secondary instructional leader in a public urban middle school, but between the years 2000 and 2009, I had seen, witnessed, and experienced the multiple positive effects that incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy within the curriculum had on both middle school and high school youth. As a former director of an academic Hip Hop program with an emphasis on dance, year after year I had witnessed first-hand student achievement excel in the core disciplines as a direct result of student membership in the program. Since my youth, I have been an aficionado,
fanatic, and student of Hip Hop culture excogitating all the elements that derive and makeup Hip Hop culture.

Although my deeply invested experiences provide me with a valuable foundation and extensive knowledge in the area of Hip Hop, they can also create limitations that can result to liabilities due to the biases I perceive when discussing the purpose behind my study. In order to mitigate potential personal and professional biases during my research, I had to separate my knowledge and experiences while engaging in the research, during the methodological process, when I was present at the academic institutions where I engaged in discourse with participants. In order to produce authentic, trustworthy findings and conclusions, I had to play the role of the learner far greater than one who is entering the research with a foundational knowledge and certain assumptions while conducting the qualitative research.

In order to mitigate possible effects that my biases might create, I had to implement strategies and research protocols that alleviated these potential bias effects. It was important to acknowledge biases, and after identifying them both personally and professionally, I could warrant a description of the findings and conclusions that are authentic and trustworthy.

The following are protocol strategies I employed to monitor and mitigate my personal and professional biases on the research study:

- Continuous Reflexive Practice – In order to measure accuracy, validity, and minimal bias during the research process, I constantly reflected through both written and oral means, my research. I needed to acknowledge when and where my emotions were affected and monitor any change in attitude as a result of my emotions getting the best of me.
Community of Practice/Peer Review – My peers, those who are also scholars, were instrumental when attempting to monitor and mitigate potential biases. These peers - as supporters - who may or may not be familiar with the topic, guided and advised me when they felt a sense of influence from personal and professional bias potentially hindering the authentic and trustworthy research.

Act as Interpreter/Translator – During my research, it was important to focus on the world of the participants. During the interview process, for example, it was my duty to understand, translate, and interpret observations and interviews while being mindful of the subjective “I’s,” (Glesne, 2011).

These protocols mitigated biases, thus increasing the authenticity and trustworthiness of qualitative research (Glesne, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In addition to these strategies, in order to counter the effect of the researcher on the case, I spent as much time as possible – taking realistic time constraints into consideration - on the campuses where I conducted my research. In order to not take up valuable observational time during school hours, I conducted four of my ten interviews off campus to ensure a more comfortable and more convenient atmosphere where the participants were relaxed, open, and honest. Also, in order to counter the effect of the case on the researcher, I focused on the study without attempting to solve any problems. I conducted my interviews at a variety of campuses at different middle and high schools in low-income urban communities across the greater Los Angeles area.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In this chapter I will outline some of my findings from the teacher interviews. My findings are separated into the following themes: (a) student/teacher connections and relationships; (b) initial reactions, student motivation and engagement; (c) student academic improvement; (d) resistance and opposition, and (e) the benefits of incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum of secondary urban classrooms.

Relationships

After conducting and completing all ten interviews, one of the major themes that stood out the most was that when incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum in secondary urban classrooms, unexpected relationships are established between teachers and their students. Throughout this country there is a disconnect between educators and urban students of color, especially those students who live in low-income communities (Alvermann, Jennifer, and Margaret, 1999; Low, 2010). Forell (2006), Hill (2009), and Perchauer (2009) state that by incorporating Hip Hop within urban classrooms, the necessary relationships are created that bridge the disconnect between urban youth and teachers, and urban youth and the curriculum. This was evident from the teacher interviews I conducted.

Paris, an African-American high school English teacher teaching at a school in downtown Los Angeles where the student population is evenly split between Black and Latino students, stated that when she incorporates Hip Hop within her classroom, student-teacher relationships are built. “Students feel that I am not that far removed from them.” She says, when discussing the effects of incorporating Hip Hop within her classroom.
Khalil, an African-American middle school history teacher who also teaches in a school in the heart of South Central Los Angeles where the student body is evenly split between Black and Latino students agrees, stating, “Using Hip Hop draws students in, and once students are drawn in, you keep a grab of them as tight as you can and you keep them there.” Khalil adds that when using Hip Hop in his classroom, it creates a bond between him and his students. “Students like the fact that I speak their language.”

Rox, an African-American youth counselor who works with predominantly Black high school students, as well as working as an after-school program director and social worker in Hollywood states, “I use Hip Hop to connect with the kids. It’s in my arsenal… and I use it as a way to connect with the kids in order to establish the necessary relationships.” He adds that using Hip Hop brings circles of generations together where students gain respect for the teacher and one another. “Hip Hop gives us a space to bond.”

Walker, a White classroom teacher working with pregnant Black and Latina teenagers in downtown Los Angeles, adds some rationale as to why relationships are established when incorporating Hip Hop within classrooms. He states that student-teacher relationships will definitely build when Hip Hop is introduced and incorporated in urban classrooms because teachers are “relating to kids on their level with things that feel familiar to them,” and when students feel that they can connect with their teachers on the same level, a bond is created and trust is established that may not have necessarily existed otherwise. Walker spoke of a 15-year-old African-American student that he had who was usually quiet, would not do any work, would not engage in classroom discussions, and would not show up to class half the time. He stated that Hip Hop was what connected the female student to him, and a relationship was established. In one of the writing
assignments, Walker describes an experience that the student wrote about after reading an article in another class:

This girl wrote about a kid who was killed and beaten to death because he was gay and she was so passionate about it and she wanted to write a great song about it. It just stands out to me because she couldn’t verbalize it with a counselor or friends but once she got a pen and pad it was powerful and beautiful… she actually ended up performing it in front of the whole school. It had a profound effect (personal communication, August 27, 2012).

Walker feels that if it were not for the connection that he was able to make with this particular student, through the use of Hip Hop, she would have never shared that story or her thoughts about how that story affected her with him or the rest of the school.

Odom, an African-American middle school math teacher in an extremely low-income community in Los Angeles where 90% of the students are Latino and 10% are Black, agrees that teachers – who otherwise may not be familiar with the daily lifestyles of the students in urban communities – can build relationships and connect to students in the school in which they teach by incorporating Hip Hop within their classrooms. Odom discusses why he feels teachers should incorporate Hip Hop in classrooms to build relationships:

(Teachers who) weren’t raised in the type of community they’re teaching in… so they might need something like Hip Hop to connect with the kids to show like, “Hey, I’m not from around here, but look, I know what you like. I like what you like. Let’s check this out in class and, you know, see what we could do with it.” You know, build a little rapport with the students by saying like, “Hey, we like the same things.” Or maybe even saying like, oh, you found some educational music that sounds good, like, you know, to build rapport with the students. So I think that’s one way it can help out, you know, teachers (Odom, personal communication, September 27, 2010).

Kris, another African-American high school history teacher teaching at an urban school on the outskirts of Los Angeles with a predominant Black student population, was
the most enthusiastic when discussing the power of using Hip Hop to connect with kids and establish the necessary relationships to move students forward. When asked about the greatest benefit of incorporating Hip Hop within his classroom, he energetically responded:

Connect! Ability to connect with a different… a younger generation, being able to connect. Like yeah, I’m older, I’m 41, but hey, you know, it’s like, wow, we can connect with you, we feel we can relate to you even though you’re 20-something years older than us. I feel a connection, you know, and that’s the biggest barrier for teachers in education, is making that connection. Because kids, for the most part, see each teacher as some old fossil, you know what I’m saying, and it’s like to be able to connect with that person on a level where they feel respected or they have something in common, that means a lot to the kids and once you can get that trust and that bond then, like I said, there’s kids that are freakin’ demons and terrors to most teachers on the campus, but I don’t have those problems with them. And when they’re getting out of line in another class I can go and check them in a way that they’ll be like, you’re right, and apologize to me where, you know, they’re going to show their ass to this other teacher, you know. I have that ability. I’ve always had that gift of being able to connect to the outcast or the misfits or the deviants. I’ve always had that gift of being able to connect with them. It just happens to be most of these kids are Hip Hop heads (Kris, personal communication, September 29, 2012).

The one story that stood out the most out of all ten of my interviews was a story shared by a White woman, Heather, who was given a high school English teaching position in one of the roughest Black neighborhoods in South Central Los Angeles. Heather did not have the typical aesthetics that are associated with the Hip Hop culture. She’s a soft spoken White woman who grew up and lived in Irvine, one of the safest cities in the entire country. Regardless, through the incorporation of Hip Hop within the curriculum, she too made connections and established relationships with some of the toughest students on campus. Heather shared:

When I was at (high school 2), down the street, it was my first year teaching as a Teach for America teacher and I had been trained in Watts at
(high school 1) over the summer and that was really rough, really hard. And when I went to (high school 2) one of the teachers joked “Oh, you went to the war” this is like a vacation compared to (high school 1). So I remember my first day teaching—all my classes kids seemed better, just more focused on learning in general and then I got to my last period of the day. The class started and everything was fine and ten or fifteen minutes into the class this little crew, well they’re not little, these big guys walked in—shaved heads, you know the whole gang attire, just kind of waltzed into my room, all five of them. It made me nervous, because here I am a new teacher and it’s the inner city. They just had this swagger and they just had this attitude right off the bat. “Who are you?” “Who do you think you are to tell me what to do?” I knew I had to reach the m. One, I reached through art. He was an artist. He would not do my work, he would sit there and just draw. So I put him into a national art contest where they paint cows for Lucerne Dairy and he was one out of twenty-five out of thousands of applicants who got chosen. So that was how I reached him. And then that whole group, that’s when I started bringing in Hip Hop into the classroom because they all loved Tupac and they would recite him. And till this day, I’m on Facebook because, actually because they’re my ex-students --I only put them on Facebook once they’ve graduated and they’re no longer my students and they’re adults,—but they’re on there and they will quote Tupac on Facebook—all those boys of mine. We got really close and I think it’s because I started bringing in literature in the classroom and making those connections for them and they started working for me and they tried really hard. I think it was the first time some of them read since elementary school. They had come from (high school 3), many of them living in rough areas. I had them as 11th graders, it was American Lit. I incorporated the poetry of American Literature with Hip Hop. Those boys stand out. They were the group I conquered (Heather, personal communication, September 17, 2012).

In all of the above mentioned experiences, teachers have been able to establish relationships with their students by incorporating Hip Hop within their classrooms.

Shannon, an African-American urban middle school English teacher teaching at a school where all but one student is Black, agrees that Hip Hop should be utilized and infused into the classroom and the curriculum. She states, “In urban schools, teachers need to meet students where they, the students, are. Teachers should always try to know and understand who their students are.” Seb, a White-French high school elective teacher teaching a Hip Hop class in a rough urban community right outside of downtown Los
Angeles with a split Black and Latino student population, states “I use Hip Hop as the language and expression that allows me to connect to my students. Without that, I know I’d experience a disconnect.” It is clear through my interviews with urban secondary teachers that Hip Hop incorporated in the classroom allows teachers to gain the trust and respect from their Black and Latino students who live in low-income communities across the greater Los Angeles area. These relationships make it easier for both students and teachers to progress forward in the students’ educational growth.

**Initial Reactions and Student Motivation**

“What?! You listen to that? Oh my God! What you know about that (Hip Hop)?” states Shannon when asked about the initial reactions of her students when first introducing Hip Hop in her classroom. “Students react with extreme enthusiasm, and they’re excited,” she adds. She shares an example:

I had a group of eighth graders and they were rough—they were a rough group of kids and they basically came in and said, “We’re not doing nothing, we’re not working, we’re not doing this, whatever,” and they were serious. After incorporating Hip Hop into the curriculum, there was still a little bit resistance about doing work related to it, but it was much easier to motivate them. (Shannon, personal communication, September 26, 2012).

Once again I found a common theme between all teachers I interviewed in relation to their students’ reactions when first introducing Hip Hop in their classrooms. According to the narratives of all the participants in my study, student’s’ initial reaction when Hip Hop is introduced in the classroom is not only positive, but it helps motivate students to learn and succeed. Maria, a high school English teacher in the heart of Los Angeles where over 90% of the students are Latino, states, (the students) “Were pretty excited. They were a little bit more at ease connecting to Hip Hop and poetry, and more
willing to look at it and see what was really being said.” Heather describes the reactions of her students when she first introduced Hip Hop within the curriculum to her students:

They loved it. Some were shocked. Anytime that you give them something that is popular that they know and is modern students will question you but they get really into it and they’re happy because I think they see that you’re trying to connect it on their level and show them how different aspects of our world connect. So an author who wrote a poem one hundred or two hundred years ago is the same concepts of many of the same rap artists of today. The themes, the concepts, the feelings connect. They love it. (Heather, personal communication, September 17, 2012).

She adds that anytime Hip Hop is incorporated within a lesson, that particular unit becomes the students’ favorite. Seb agrees, stating that every time he’s introduced Hip Hop in a lesson, his students got really excited. He adds, “Those lessons where Hip Hop is infused, become those students’ favorite.” Seb elaborates:

Well, first of all they were so excited to be in a class that was even named Hip Hop, (imitates a student’s voice) ‘we’re going to be in a Hip Hop class, I don’t know what’s going to happen but it’s going to be fun.’ So initially they’re really excited, then the first couple of days they’re not that excited when they realize that they are going to have homework and that we’re not going to sit around and watch videos and listen to music all day. They realize it is much more social studies then sitting around and hanging out. But after that, after they get over the initial shock of actually having to do work, they then fall in line, and it always ends up being everyone’s favorite class, and actually other teachers always drop in when they have a prep period, and parents come in, and it’s usually everyone’s favorite class. The initial shock is that they don’t expect it to be a class where you actually have to do work (Seb, personal communication, September 18, 2012).

He adds, “Black and Latino students are not given an opportunity to hear about their culture, to express themselves in a way that makes sense to them,” so when students are familiar with the content of the lessons and can make connections to the literature being used in the classroom, students become motivated to succeed:
Motivated? Yeah, oh yeah, definitely, I would say, that’s to the point that I had parents and teachers tell me, I don’t know what you’re doing in your class but these students are coming in, and now they know about some of the things we’re talking about in history and government. Parents are telling me my kids are watching the news now, or asking me a bunch of questions about social issues. There is a big, big difference. What I do at the end of the year, I’ll have my students fill out a survey. I’ll ask them a series of questions, like what did you like most? What did you like least? How do you feel you’ve changed since the beginning of the school year? Would you recommend this class to your friends? How would you change the class? I just ask them a bunch of different questions. I’ve read surveys that have brought me to tears because the students are witnessing their own change. They’ll tell me this class changed their life. ‘When I first came in, I just thought I was a dumb student, now I realize what I say matters.’ I’ve had a student tell me when she started the class she was racist, and this class opened up her eyes to the cultures, and she is now more tolerant. I see it. The surveys report it. The parents and staff witness it as well, so it’s very obvious (Seb, personal communication, September 18, 2012).

Khalil had a similar experience to Seb. When he first introduced Hip Hop into his history class, he states, “They were happy. They were ecstatic.” But once the students realized that there was work to be done, Khalil noticed a change in the level of excitement of his students:

After about a week or two, the newness of it kind of settled down and they were now looking at it like, “Aw man, this is hard work.” It’s not going to be a class where all you do is listen to music all day. It’s not going to be a class where all you do is watch videos all day. You’re going to write. You’re going to put in work. A lot of students are just lazy. When you start putting work into it, then the students are like, “Man, this class is not fun anymore.” But it was a lot of work. I had a lot of video material in regard to break dancing especially that the students really liked. The video would show break dance moves. Then in a split screen it would show those same moves being practiced in martial arts forms, African cultural dance practices, Latino cultural dances, even tap dance, swing; it would do a split screen to let them know that break dancing or Krunping has a history that goes way back further than what you guys understand. It goes back to ancient cultures, and what we’ve done is to borrow those ancient cultures to create the Hip Hop culture, or at least the break dancing aspect of the Hip Hop culture… there were a lot of students who really got into it (Khalil, personal communication, August 26, 2012).
Rox stated that as soon as he introduces Hip Hop with the at-risk students he works with, “Facial expressions change… and through the looks, nods, smiles, etc. I’m given their approval.” When working with a group of at-risk foster students, Rox describes one student who he recalled not only being motivated to succeed as a result of Hip Hop being incorporated into a lesson, but continuing to pursue her education long after one particular exercise was taught:

We had this one girl - she was claiming that she didn’t write at all in the beginning, and then we did the exercise where you pick 10 words and then you build a poem out of them. And she just had a knack for being really vivid with her wording, and in that circle, she said that was the first poem she ever wrote. And all the other kids were in awe of it. Like wow! That’s crazy! And they were really encouraging to each other because most of them were experiencing writing a poem for the first time. She went on to get a scholarship off of writing poetry and went to college off of that scholarship. It was just amazing to see a kid find something that they didn’t know about themselves. That they had a knack for something that they didn’t know, and then they found a love for it because they received praise by their peers, like having a knack and just really going with it and using that as a way to do something that they’ve never thought that they could do. Like she wasn’t thinking she would ever go to college (Rox, personal communication, September 1, 2012).

Rox reminisces about the time he ended up running into this same student years later, and when he asked her about what she was doing with her life, she responded, “Still writing lyrics and poetry.”

Walker stated that his at-risk pregnant mothers at the school he taught at were “pretty happy” when Hip Hop was first introduced in his classroom. He added that after Hip Hop was infused into his lessons, he noticed a major shift in students showing up to class and/or school:

They came to class. This was a school for teenage mothers so you can imagine the demands on them outside of class. It would be a miracle for them to get to class in general. There was a pretty good rate of them
coming to class. Then there were the ones that definitely took to it. The African-Americans took to much better and they were there every time and they understood exactly what I was teaching much more than the other kids (Walker, personal communication, August 27, 2012).

Paris also saw an increase in students showing up to class when Hip Hop was first introduced in her classroom. “The students liked it. There were smiles. They thought it was cool. The interest level increased.”

Odom, the only teacher in my study who teaches math, describes his students’ reactions the first time he introduced Hip Hop in his classroom:

Oh, they were just like shocked, in shock and awe. They couldn’t believe I did it. They couldn’t believe that math actually sounded like cool to a song. And then after like that very first lesson, after I did the song one time, they memorized like slope intercept formula is $Y=MX + B$. And they couldn’t believe like, “wow, I just memorized a formula that fast” for slope intercept. So it was kind of like they were amazed, happy, you know (Odom, personal communication, September 27, 2012).

When I asked Odom if he noticed any motivational changes in his students after introducing Hip Hop into his math lessons, he stated:

Oh yeah, definitely, definitely. The ones that really weren’t engaged at all are the ones that, you know, get more in tune. Now this student I do remember. Her name was Veridiana. And we were learning the quadratic formula. And this was actually an R&B song that I wrote. And she was like one of the lower students. But when I did that song she just, boom! She rose to the top. Quadratics, she probably did like top ten percent in the class when we did that unit. All because of the song (Odom, personal communication, September 27, 2012).

When I asked Kris about his experience with students’ initial reactions, he changed his voice mimicking his student’s, “Oh, you’re the cool teacher!” but when I transitioned to the motivational piece, Kris did not respond with a personal experience he had with one particular student or a group of students, but rather stated:

I mean, hip-hop is a billion, billion dollar business, I mean, it’s
everywhere we go. Commercials, advertisements, NBA, NFL, half-time celebrations, it’s everywhere. So my philosophy is why not embrace something that’s all around. And it’s something that they can easily identify and connect to as opposed to doing this old school, you know, old school outdated teaching methods that don’t work… it’s already proven worldwide that hip-hop is accepted, it’s just trying to break through these old regimes of education that it can be a resourceful and useful tool (Kris, personal communication, September 29, 2012).

From the narratives of the teachers I interviewed, it’s obvious that the initial reaction of Hip Hop being introduced into the curriculum of these teacher’s’ urban classrooms are all positive, attention grabbing ones full of enthusiasm. We do see, though, that in a couple of cases where Hip Hop was introduced, students did not initially expect to really do work. As Seb stated, “Just because it’s Hip Hop doesn’t mean that every day they’re (the students) automatically be tuned in.” But he does add that once the students get over that hump of yes, it’s Hip Hop and yes, there’s a lot of academic work to be done, “They just really take things (in class) much more seriously.”

Finally Khalil was the only participant who I interviewed who stated that his Latino students’ appreciation for Hip Hop being used in the classroom only lasted for so long. Unlike his Black students, Khalil’s Latino students often asked, after the initial first two weeks, if alternative genres of music could be incorporated into the lessons being taught in class. According to Khalil’s experiences as a teacher, Latino students have a broader range of popular cultural styles as compared to his Black students who primarily identify and associate with the Hip Hop culture.

**Student Academic Improvement**

Although all the teachers in my study seemed to be on the same page when it came to the initial reactions of the students when Hip Hop was first introduced, and when
using Hip Hop to create student/teacher relationships and motivating students to succeed, it was to varying degrees of success in regard to student academic achievement and/or improvement when incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum in low-income urban classrooms. Seb states that he has noticed students improve academically in English and history classes, but not in other disciplines. “If they’re ‘F’ students in some classes, they’ll stay ‘F’ students, especially in math.” Seb continued to describe how this personally disturbs him knowing that he’s witnessed students improve academically in some classes, showing that they actually have the ability and capacity to succeed, but not applying the same sort of effort to succeed in other disciplines.

Although Odom has witnessed students improve academically when Hip Hop is incorporated into his lessons, he feels that the incorporation of Hip Hop is just a supplemental added bonus. He explains, “Music alone is not going to just raise their grades… it complements good teaching… it motivates them, but then they just get bored after a while.” Odom continues to explain that those students who improve academically the most with the infusion of Hip Hop within the curriculum are those students who are willing to stay after class or stay after school in order to receive additional help. He adds that Hip Hop is the reason some of those students who succeed are willing to come and receive additional help, but it’s not the sole reason behind their academic improvement.

Khalil would have liked to say that he’s experienced students improving academically, but he too has been rather disappointed. He explained how students in his science class initially get excited and even form rap groups to write songs about what they are learning in class, but none seemed interested in finishing the assignments. He states:
Unfortunately a large number of students at my school are extremely lazy. Because of the social environment that they’re in or the social environment that they see on television, they don’t necessarily see putting in all the work it takes to get them to success. They’re so used to seeing people getting money fast, quick! They’re so used to seeing the success, but they’re not used to seeing the hard work behind what it takes to get there (personal communication, August 26, 2012).

In one area where Khalil has actually witnessed the use of Hip Hop infused into his lessons improve student academic achievement is when Hip Hop has been used to establish a bridge in order to connect to and create an understanding of canonical texts and historical figures. Khalil explains:

If you want students to write about the accomplishments of Albert Einstein, for example, you’ve covered history, because he’s a historical figure; you’ve covered science, because he’s a scientist and a mathematician; and you’ve covered English, because now the students are writing about it (personal communication, August 26, 2012).

Morell and Duncan-Andrade (2002), state that students can utilize Hip Hop as a form of popular culture to scaffold their critical and analytical skills in order to understand canonical texts. Heather agrees, stating that when attempting to teach about historical figures or using canonical texts, students are not interested, but when using Hip Hop to connect to those texts, “It’s like a light bulb turns on.” She sees academic improvements within her students. “They get it,” she states, when you’re teaching literary devices from “some old dude (from) two hundred years ago, they don’t care, but when incorporating most of their favorite artists, it definitely helps them to understand the figurative language and literary devices as English teachers that we need to teach.” Kris also states that he’s noticed a lot of his “so-called thugs or hardheads” improve academically. He states that teaching anything pre-World War II is outdated for the kids; therefore he uses Hip Hop to
give his students a sense of ownership to the lessons he teaches, “I was making the class exciting and giving them something that they could relate to, giving them a piece of ownership of the classroom.” He noticed that even though he still had to teach the students canonical texts, using Hip Hop as a tool to bridge the lessons together, “students were showing up more to class and wanting to learn.” He adds that students felt, “I can actually do an assignment that entails Hip Hop,” and that by using Hip Hop to teach canonical texts gives his students “a sense of power” where they otherwise would not feel that they were capable of having.

Maria, Walker, Shannon, and Paris also witnessed student academic improvements when Hip Hop was introduced within the curriculum of their low-income urban classrooms. Maria describes her students as “more willing to look for things and grasp onto things that they do understand and then explain those things enough to each other that they really will get a pretty decent understanding.” Walker states that he “definitely saw a handful of kids lock in and get focused and serious about it (learning).” Shannon stated, “Oh, absolutely, yeah, I saw academic improvement in my students.” She adds that when she does see her students improving, she feels the need to motivate them to continue to succeed. She tells her students, “You’re capable. You’re a great thinker. You’re articulate. You just have to understand that you can apply that to all these other things. I mean, your impact on the world is tremendous.” And when asked about noticing any academic improvements in her students, Paris states:

I would like to say so, yes. I was able to access them and see did they understand, did they grasp what I was trying to teach them, extended metaphor imagery, figurative language. Did they get it and I think with the use of the (Hip Hop) songs it helped.

Although for the first time in my findings chapter there does not seem to be
consistency amongst my participants in relation to improved academic achievement when Hip Hop is incorporated within the curriculum in low-income urban classrooms, there are pockets of positive successful experiences some of these teachers have had. Implication as to how some of these teachers could experience more positive results will be discussed in the next chapter.

**Resistance: Not Everyone Will Support Your Hip Hop Efforts**

As stated in the Resistance section of the literature review not all educators or administrative leaders are willing to embrace Hip Hop as a form of culturally relevant pedagogy in schools. This resistance and opposition were evident with some of the participants in my study. Seb, for example, had experienced success incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum for five straight years. He had the support of his administration and the teachers on campus. Recently, there was an administration change at the school in which Seb teaches. The new administration had not been around to witness firsthand the importance of Seb teaching Hip Hop as an elective class. Apparently there was a need for a health teacher. Rather than hiring someone who had a credential to teach health, according to Seb, and since the administration did not see the value in teaching Hip Hop to the urban students, they forced Seb to teach the health class and drop all but one of the Hip Hop classes. Seb stated, “Teaching Hip Hop was not their priority. The new administration had no creativity, no imagination, no vision. The school, for the kids, became a place where dreams come to die.” Needless to say, Seb was not thrilled about the new administrator’s decision to close the Hip Hop classes.

When Paris decided to incorporate Hip Hop within the curriculum of her classroom, she did have support from her administration, but states that there were a lot
of questioning coming from other teachers. “Why would you use that? What’s the point? I don’t get it. There isn’t another way you can illustrate that?” were several of the comments and questions her colleagues had posed. She adds:

There was a lot of questioning. Like you know loaded questioning. “Oh, what’s the point, why are you doing it?” I just did it anyway. I just told them that there’s merit in it. I justified it to a degree. “This is what it’s doing. This is why I do it. Take it or leave it.” I really don’t make any apologies for my teaching style.

Kris shared the same attitude as Paris did. He stated that some teachers and administrators attempted to question why he would use Hip Hop in the classroom, but he used it anyway. He felt, “It’s my classroom, it works, and no one comes in to check on me anyway, I’m going to use it.” Rox also had teachers who questioned his using Hip Hop, especially English teachers. “Hip Hop is considered – it’s looked at as a negative,” Rox states, “It has this really negative appearance for some people, so it’s not always welcomed.” He continues to explain how some teachers are not willing to even give it a chance, or attempt to learn about the positive effects using Hip Hop could have, especially when you’re bonding with kids. “You try to have conversations with people but some stuff is so passive aggressive that it never really presents an opportunity to build on it.” Rox also stated that he continues to use Hip Hop in the classroom, because for him, it works.

When I asked Shannon if she had faced any resistance or opposition from other teachers or her administration when first introducing Hip Hop to her students and incorporating Hip Hop within her curriculum, she broke out into laughter:

Oh, of course. Yes, of course. (Laughter). “What are you doing?” Absolutely. “They listen to that outside of school. They listen to that on their own. What do they need to listen to that for? You’re supposed to be
teaching.” I even had one administrator - it just shows that we have idiots in charge - that actually asked me, how was I teaching the standards. “We have standards that we’re teaching. How can you be teaching the standards if you’re using this?” Well, because, there’s vocabulary in the song (laughter), there’s a narrator, there’s a tone, there’s figurative language, you know, so (laughter).

She continued to explain how after her initial reaction to anyone questioning her, she would sit down with the person and pull out the standards and explain to the individual who was questioning her how she tied the lesson that infused Hip Hop to the standards, “We’re studying vocabulary, we’re studying language, we’re studying tone, we’re studying voice, we’re studying audience, you know. I probably was reprimanded or something. Sometimes you gotta stand up for what you believe in.”

Once again, the response that stood out the most came from Heather. When asked the question, she began to recall the time when she first started teaching at her urban high school. She stated that she remembered getting into various conversations with some of the faculty who were veteran teachers in the district. She explained how all of them viewed Hip Hop as being bad. Heather told the story of a boy she was working with, a boy who wanted to become a tattoo artist. One day she was confronted in the copy room by the lead veteran teacher, “she gave me a lecture in the copy room about how I shouldn’t be supporting the students with stuff like urban art and Hip Hop.” The teacher told Heather that “I should be telling them that tattoos are bad. You should be doing something better with your life.” Heather explained that as a new young teacher, she stood there stunned and shocked. She felt she had to begin reflecting to see if she really believed in using Hip Hop as a tool to motivate urban kids to succeed. She felt that there were many aspects to think about. A few years later, and now more experienced, she
explains that she continues to use Hip Hop in her classroom, and it works.

**Why Incorporate Hip Hop in Urban Classrooms**

Hip Hop establishes the necessary connections between students and teachers that can ultimately trigger some students’ engagement which in turn can result in greater success. Hip Hop establishes relationships that create connections between students and teachers. Hip Hop might help some students improve academic achievement, but the responses from my participants vary as to the importance of why we, as educators, should incorporate Hip Hop as a form of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) within the curriculum of low-income urban secondary classrooms when attempting to educate Black and Latino students. When asked why the need to incorporate Hip Hop in the above mentioned classrooms, Seb explains:

> Because the educational system is flawed, and it’s collapsing, and it’s a nightmare. Students need something they could connect to, something that allows them to find the value, their own place in this world. The old traditional way of doing things doesn’t allow them to figure out who they are. It doesn’t give them an opportunity to care about the world around them. When you could bring a program, a curriculum that cares about them, that’s for them, that allows them to be them, that allows them to express themselves the way they want to express themselves, to explore who they are. And also that gives validity to their culture, whether my students are Black or Latino or whatever the case may be, a curriculum that allows them to see themselves in it, that’s important.

It’s obvious that Seb’s response is much deeper than the simple connection students have with popular culture. Walker agrees, stating the kids need a new way to learn, and a new way to feel about school. He feels that the “old school traditional” teaching practices are outdated.

> Kids look up to Hip Hop artists and there is a power in looking up to someone, and if you could harness some of that power… and infuse it into a kid in a classroom, I don’t think you can match that with the traditional
Paris also agrees stating, “I feel that education is still focused on a Eurocentric view. I think that is doing a disservice to our students, especially the demographics that I teach.” She pauses and explains her thoughts with the following analogy, “Why would I sell popsicles to people in Alaska. These people are already cold. That doesn’t make sense.” She continues to mock the current educational system by making references to classic teaching styles used by Aristotle and Socrates, then dramatically states, “But these kids are not Greek. They’re not even European, so I think they need another mode or vehicle to access what I’m saying and what I’m trying to instruct.” Paris compares the Eurocentric view of education as showing students everything White, which she adds, “I think that’s a little distorted, disillusioned if you will.” She brings up Walt Whitman’s *O Captain! My Captain*, and states that she could teach her students the same English conventions that are found in that literature, but using literature or lyrics from Erykah Badu, or Common (two Hip Hop emcee’s) instead.

Heather also agrees that attempting to teach old European authors, such as Poe or Dickinson, to Black and Latino students from low-income urban communities is challenging. She feels that by incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum, you’re making a connection between the old and the new. Heather states, “Hip Hop artists are expressing their thoughts and their feelings and what their environment is giving them, just like Poe and Dickinson explained their feelings in their writings from their environment… its art.” She adds, “It’s very important for me to connect the old and the new and show them that it’s really all the same.”
Khalil takes a different approach, stating:

Teachers who may or may not have exposed themselves to the Hip Hop culture need to expose themselves, because this is what the kids are listening to, this is what the kids are doing. This may give you an understanding to what the kid’s mentality is. This is what the kids are doing. Once you open yourself up to absorb some of what’s in their world, then you could open them up to absorb some of what’s in your world (the curriculum).

Both Kris and Odom agree. In talking about what kids know, understand, and relate to, Kris states, “Hip Hop is worldwide, it’s the universal language, and it’s what’s going on in the streets, the ghetto, the news.” Kris explains that the images children in urban demographics see in Hip Hop videos, commercials, endorsements, etc. drive the attention of these children. “Kids can relate to that passion,” Kris states, “and educators can definitely benefit from incorporating Hip Hop in their classrooms because it’s the language of the youth.” Odom also feels that the growth of Hip Hop over the last 20, 30 years has become “a worldwide phenomenon.” Odom states:

Children are listening to Hip Hop every day. It just resonates with them, just the music, the rhythm, it just resonates, and it’s only natural to start using things like that (Hip Hop) in the classroom because it’s something the kids are seeing every day.

Odom continues by including himself, and other adults, “like we’re rhythmic beings, everything we do is to a rhythm, heartbeat, breathe, walk, talk, and so, yeah, I just think it’s important because it’s just part of our life now. Hip Hop is a part of our life.”

Rox continues to express that incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum of low-income urban schools, or when working with at-risk youth is important simply to establish that connection, that bond with the children. He passionately explains that establishing relationships when working with these types of children is crucial in order to
make successful progress.

Shannon stated that when attempting to teach students who are struggling, Hip Hop is an extremely successful motivational tool that teachers can utilize. She states that when teachers incorporate Hip Hop within their urban classrooms, “They are getting their students to understand that their perspective and their worldview counts.”

And finally, when Maria was asked why she feels the need to incorporate Hip Hop within her urban classroom, she simply responded, “I want to be culturally relevant.”

**Summary**

It is evident through the teacher interviews that there were a lot of positive experiences when incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum of their collective urban classrooms. The most common theme derived from the interviews is that all of the participants felt that infusion of Hip Hop establishes the necessary relationships that engage students in their learning, and builds on student/teacher relationships. Also the participants collectively had great interest from their students as well as positive reactions when first introducing Hip Hop within the curriculum. Most of the teachers in my study felt that infusion of Hip Hop really motivated their students to participate and engage in classroom activities and discussion, complete assignments, and improve academically. Not all of the teachers felt that their students did improve academically as a result of incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum. What was evident though is that incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum or during instruction is a great added tool, or bonus, when attempting to teach urban secondary students of color. As several participants stated after the interviews were conducted, “Hip Hop is not going to be this miraculous answer to eradicating the achievement gap in this country, but it is a start.”
We do see some of the resistance that Dimitriadis (2009), Forell (2006), and others have discussed by teachers and administrators when attempting to incorporate Hip Hop within public education. Several of the participants shared their experiences of resistance. Regardless, all of the participants in this study feel that in order to be culturally relevant in this diverse age, incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum in public schools in low-income urban communities is crucial and critical when attempting to establish relationships that engage student learning, motivate student success, and attempt to increase student academic achievement.
CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of teachers who incorporate Hip Hop as a form of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) within the curriculum in low-income urban secondary schools. Specifically, this study has examined to what extent teachers have perceived their educational experiences have increased student motivation and academic achievement among low-income urban secondary school students of color. Based on the findings presented in Chapter 4, this chapter will now address the potential educational benefits and challenges that incorporating Hip Hop as a form of popular culture within the curriculum could have towards addressing the achievement gap in public, low-income urban secondary schools.

The study examined the following key research questions:

1. What experiences have teachers had when incorporating Hip Hop based instruction within the curriculum in low-income urban secondary schools?

2. What do teachers who use Hip Hop based instruction within the curriculum perceive to be the benefits (if any) related to student motivation in low-income urban secondary school students?

3. What do teachers who use Hip Hop based instruction within the curriculum perceive to be the benefits (if any) related to student academic achievement in low-income urban secondary school students?

As addressed in the literature review, there is a significant gap in the academic achievement of Black and Latino students versus their White counterparts (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002; Haycock, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lee, 2002; Peske & Haycock,
There are many factors that attribute to the disparities in the academic gap; including, but not limited to: socioeconomic status, parental education, parental occupation, apathetic attitudes displayed by educators, and perceptions of student abilities, particularly for students who come from diverse cultural backgrounds (Bernstein, 1961; Freire, 1970, 1973; Howard, 2010, J.E. King, 1991; Low, 2011; Pine & Hilliard, 1990; Riessman, 1962). Far too often, educators fail to see the value in embracing the vast cultural diversity of their student population. Educators should instead utilize the rich cultural differences of their students’ background as a tool for their student’s’ educational well-being. If educators were to understand and appreciate the cultural differences of their students, they could create effective and appropriate spaces of learning where they could maximize their students’ learning experience (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2010; Zeichner, Melnick, & Gomez, 1996).

“Public schools have participated in labeling and targeting urban youth as ‘public enemies’ who resist educators’ efforts to ‘uplift’ them” (Prier, 2012, p. 143). Black and Latino students who live in low-income urban communities that identify with Hip Hop often fall into this category, in which they are labeled and considered challenging and resisting learners. Educators fail to consider that in order for transformational change to occur, students’ culture and social justice histories need to be acknowledged, addressed, and appreciated. Prier (2012) has urged educators to think about the influence and incorporation of Hip Hop as a critical pedagogical strategy that is relevant and important in attempting to improve urban students’ academic achievement, motivation, and the relationships between teachers and students. The ten participants in my study appreciate the importance of understanding and embracing the cultural differences of their students.
and have incorporated popular culture - Hip Hop in this case - into the curriculum in order to address the cultural differences, create connections that establish relationships, motivate their students to succeed, and attempt to improve academic achievement regardless of any opposition or resistance they may face.

**Experiences through Hip Hop Based Instruction**

According to the National Center for Education Information (NCEI), by 2005 85% of teachers in America were White. Although this is a decrease from the 92% in 1990, there still exists an extremely disproportionate percentage of White teachers versus culturally diverse teachers in U.S. public schools. Low (2011) contends, “In a well-established trend in U.S. classrooms, as the student population grows increasingly diverse, the teaching population remains resiliently, and increasingly, white” (p. 3). This often creates spaces where a lack of cultural competence exists when White teachers work with culturally diverse students, particularly Black and Latino students from low-income urban communities. As demonstrated by the narratives of the participants in my study, Hip Hop is the “hook” (p. 4), as Low (2011) puts it, that captures the attention of students when attempting to establish the necessary relationships between students and teachers, engaging students in learning, and facilitating rich and complicated conversations about language, culture, and identity.

**Relationships**

Teacher-student relationships are central when attempting to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogies in low-income urban spaces of learning (Dimitriadis, 2009; Hill, 2009; Howard, 2010; Linton & Singleton, 2006; Low, 2011; Perchauer, 2009; Seidel, 2011; Watkins, 2005). Incorporating Hip Hop as a form of Culturally Relevant
Pedagogy (CRP) establishes the necessary bridge between the urban youth and teachers, and urban youth and the curriculum to the lived experiences of urban students (Duncan-Andrare & Morrell, 2002; Hamm Forell, 2006; Stone Hanley, 2007; Stovall, 2006). In my study, as I sought to determine whether relationships were established as a result of the experiences teachers had when incorporating Hip Hop within their respective classrooms, I could not help but think how important these positive relationships have been affirmed when Hip Hop was introduced and incorporated by all of the participants in my study. By infusing Hip Hop within their lessons, my participants were able to connect with their students, establish positive and productive teacher-student relationships, and use Hip Hop to bridge the curriculum to the lived experiences of their urban Black and Latino students.

When Hip Hop is first introduced to Black and Latino students from low-income urban communities, students are often shocked that their teacher was aware of such a pop-cultural phenomenon. Since many of these students associate and identify with Hip Hop culture, they are often astounded when their “older teacher” speaks of a culture and genre of music that belongs to them. After the initial shock, students are usually enthusiastic, receptive, and eager to participate in the learning process. As Paris stated when she first introduced Hip Hop in her class, “There were smiles.”

Oftentimes, urban students of color feel a sense of alienation where they do not feel that their intellectual curiosity and critical thoughts are encouraged (Emdin, 2010; Kopano, 2011). Forell (2006) reminds us that by incorporating Hip Hop in the classroom, educators are empowering students to become “active partners” in their educational experiences (p. 33). When teachers incorporate a form of popular culture that urban
students can easily connect to, teachers then have an opportunity to capture the attention of these students. This was evident when Khalil stated, “adding Hip Hop draws students in, and once students are drawn in, you keep a grab of them as tight as you can and you keep them there.” Once teachers have the attention of their students, then partnerships are able to be established.

Incorporating Hip Hop within the classroom allows students to realize and feel that they are not too far removed from their teacher, thus expanding opportunities to establish the necessary student/teacher connections. Most of the participants in my study stated that when they initially incorporated Hip Hop in their respective classrooms, students verbalized their intrigue and curiosity in having a teacher - one who is far older than them - who understands and appreciates Hip Hop culture. As Kris stated, “I’m older, I’m 41, but hey, you know, it’s like, wow, we can connect with you, we feel we can relate to you even though you’re 20 something years older than us.” Shannon discussed how even though her students initially exploded with enthusiasm when Hip Hop was first mentioned; they still initially questioned her, “What you know about that (Hip Hop)?” She adds that once given an opportunity to hear what the teacher had to say, they quickly turned around and showed appreciation for the fact that their teacher could relate to them by identifying with their love of the Hip Hop culture. Odom stated, “My students like knowing that I am into the same thing that they’re into, and this ultimately erases the ‘age-line’ thus creating a buy-in by the students because integrating Hip Hop breaks down the age barrier.” Rox agrees, stating that “Hip Hop brings circles of generations together.” This goes to show that when teachers admire and identify with the same pop-cultural norms that their students identify with and infuse these norms into their lessons,
their student realize that their teacher is not an unreachable old relic, thus creating connections where age is no longer a barrier to the possible relationships that could be established.

Linton & Singleton (2006) state that a well-established language and process for communication must be established between teachers and students in order to create the necessary relationships that will improve student engagement and performance. In my study, this language and form of communication to connect with the students and ultimately establish relationships has come in the form of Hip Hop (Hill, 2009; Perchauer, 2009). Seb agrees, stating “I use Hip Hop as the language and expression that allows me to connect to my students.” Rox concurs, “I use Hip Hop to connect with the kids. It’s in my arsenal… and I use it as a way to connect with the kids in order to establish the necessary relationships.” He adds that gaining respect from Black and Latino urban youth is difficult yet extremely important, especially when attempting to educate them. By using Hip Hop as a way to communicate with the kids he works with, Rox has felt that he has been able to gain their respect and establish relationships.

As a result of using Hip Hop in their classrooms, the participants in my study not only felt that the age-barrier was eradicated, but they also felt that relationships were definitely established. Walker, in his narrative about the 15-year-old African American student, stated that if it were not for the connection he was able to make through the use of Hip Hop in the classroom, his student would have never shared that story or her thoughts about how that story affected her with him or the rest of the school. Seb shares similar feelings:

I’ve seen some students come alive. I’ve seen students who are very shy, and quiet, and reserved, just blossom. They’ll come in the first few weeks,
maybe the first semester they might just keep to themselves. My class, I ask a lot of them, performances, and skits, and a lot of class participation. I ask a lot of them. They’re reluctant in the beginning, but by the end of the school year, you have students who were scared to talk, but now they come in rapping in front of the class, and attempting to freestyle. They just get out of their shell, I think that’s amazing.

The students who “get out of their shell” are products of the relationships established as a result of Hip Hop being the “hook” that reels the students in.

Heather, after facing resistance from some of her veteran colleagues, also strongly felt that if it were not for her infusing Hip Hop within her classroom, she would have not been able to establish the necessary connections with what she felt were some of the toughest high school students she had ever encountered. Shannon probably said it best when she discussed how, if it were not for the connections established through Hip Hop that enable her to establish relationships with her students, she would not be able to understand the different perspectives her students bring to class that ultimately give her students the confidence necessary to succeed.

The findings relating to the incorporation of Hip Hop and the forging of relationships between teachers and students seem to suggest that incorporating Hip Hop within low-income secondary urban classrooms appears to facilitate the development of key relationships between teachers and students. Low (2011) and Hill (2009) remind us that through the use of Hip Hop, students are not only able to make sense of their lives, but they are also able to see that their teachers have a genuine compassion for their academic well-being; thus establishing these positive relationships. This validates what Forell (2006) and Perchauer (2009) find when incorporating Hip Hop within urban classrooms: necessary relationships are created that bridge the disconnect between urban youth and teachers, and urban youth and the curriculum. I would recommend, based on
the findings that teachers who might face challenges when teaching Black and Latino students from low-income urban communities – possibly related to the lack of understanding the lives and cultural differences of the students they serve - could greatly benefit by introducing and incorporating Hip Hop within their classrooms. As evident through the narratives of the participants in my study, introducing and infusing Hip Hop within their classrooms allowed them to better understand their students and establish the necessary relationships to move those students forward.

**Motivation**

Motivating students to engage in their learning experiences or to take their education seriously in order to succeed academically can be a challenge, especially when working with Black and Latino students who come from low-income urban communities. In his book, *Culturally Relevant Teaching: Hip-Hop Pedagogy in Urban Schools*, Prier (2012) discusses many of the pressures and challenges urban youth face on a daily basis living in communities that include gang affiliation or fear of gangs, selling drugs as a way to survive financially, the temptations of using drugs, succumbing to the prison system, dropping out of school in order to work and assist their parents as a means of survival due to the complexities that come with living in poverty, or the simple fact that many of these kids live with the existential issues of life or death (p. 115). Due to these troublesome circumstances that many urban youth face on a daily basis, Prier suggests:

> We (educators) need to think creatively about the educational possibilities and benefits if students are to account for and take into consideration knowledge they obtained from the street, the sociocognitive abilities that have been crucial to their very survival, and curricular and pedagogical strategies that might be more meaningful and motivational to their pursuit of learning (p. 115).
The curricular and pedagogical strategies Prier is referring to is Hip Hop, and the participants in my study agree that in order to motivate urban students to pursue their learning more seriously, educators must understand the educational possibilities and benefits that Hip Hop brings to education that connect what students know to what is being taught to them.

As discussed above, incorporating Hip Hop in urban classrooms establishes the necessary connections that create student/teacher relationships, but infusing Hip Hop also creates connections between the lived experiences of the students and the curriculum being taught. Seb stated that by incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum, educators are giving students the opportunity to hear and learn about their culture. He feels that these “familiar” lessons allow urban students to express themselves in ways that makes sense to them. According to Seb, many of the Black and Latino students he teaches would not come to school if it were not for the “Hip Hop” being incorporated in his class. He states that, as a result of Hip Hop, his class provides the necessary space where his students can express many of the difficulties they face on a daily basis. His students write essays and raps describing events that have taken place or acts that they have witnessed. “Many of my students write about police brutality, or their anger towards their family, friends, or the government, or gangs, or racial differences between one another, or having ‘street-smarts’, or even religion.” Seb recalls one student who wrote a rap, in which the student stated, “I am who I am. Keep looking like a diamond in the sand.” Here we see that by using Hip Hop text, the student has written for a particular assignment, has been motivated to not only complete the assignment, but also to show through her own words the increased self-esteem and self-confidence that she has found through the motivation
of Hip Hop. Seb’s students feel a sense of empowerment, and when given the opportunity to incorporate their lived experiences with the work they do in class, they are motivated to come to school and motivated to do their work. Seb asserts that these connections are the greatest motivational factors when attempting to teach these students.

Rox states that when he first begins to work with at-risk youth, students have no motivation to succeed academically. He adds that many students he’s worked with come to school to socialize during nutrition and lunch, or to play basketball. Once Hip Hop is introduced into their spaces of learning, Rox says that his students become motivated to write. In regard to writing through Hip Hop, Rox stated, “It’s the strength of relevance, like it makes things relatable because that’s the world that they live in. Hip Hop is the music they are listening to so it becomes their language.” Through writing, Rox’s students realize that they have the opportunity to share their lived experiences and also that they have better writing abilities than they might have perceived about themselves. In regard to the reaction of their peers, Rox states, “They begin to gain respect from other kids in a room that didn’t know that they write, and they come into the space and they begin to see that writing is respected even amongst their peers.” As stated in the previous chapter, Rox encountered one young lady, who was not motivated to succeed, but through the incorporation of Hip Hop within her writing, she not only found her hidden talent, she ended up receiving a scholarship for college. Rox mentioned that he often runs into former students at Hip Hop events, such as Paid Dues (an annual Hip Hop concert featuring Underground Hip Hop artists who perform on stage) and they all tell him that they have continued to write. This goes to show that the motivation that inspires his
students to learn and master such a discipline becomes, for them, a life-long love and appreciation for writing.

Odom stated that incorporating Hip Hop within the classroom definitely motivates his students to engage in their learning. He explains that when attempting to teach urban youth, particularly students who come from poverty, you will find that oftentimes these students are bored and not really interested in learning or school. By bringing Hip Hop into the classroom, students wake up and even get excited about learning. He told a story of one student who was ready to quit. She felt that through regular teaching strategies, she was not learning, nor was she motivated to learn. After incorporating Hip Hop into the lessons, Odom states that she finally understood the material. She tells her teacher, “You know, Mr. (Odom), if it wasn’t for this music, I would have given up.” Odom states that this particular student, especially after understanding that one mathematical concept, told him, “You know what? I’m going to keep working and keep trying.” Odom concludes that as a result of using Hip Hop as a tool in the lessons that he teaches, this student ended up passing the class with a “B”.

Odom states that his students get so excited about Hip Hop’s infusion into his math lessons that many of his students come to his classroom during nutrition or after school to seek additional assistance in math or to enhance what they are learning in class. He shared another story of one of his students who first started coming to his class during nutrition because she was having trouble with other kids on campus. He describes how this particular student got so into learning about math through the use of Hip Hop that she began to master many mathematical concepts: “She just openly, just did everything to show that she knew her math. She’s like, ‘I’m a math sensation,’” Odom reminisces.
Shannon described the challenges she faced when attempting to get her students to produce any work. She stated that Hip Hop was the driving force behind her students’ motivation to complete any work. She added, “Hip Hop is the key in understanding her students’ perspective of their world, their culture.” Shannon describes a motivational story with one of her former students:

His name was Darron and I had him in summer school. This kid was a football player and he was struggling - he had failed everything. The first assignment they had was they had to memorize this Tupac song, “Keep Ya Head Up” and recite it. Because it was about, you know, we’re in summer school, you guys failed, this kind of sucks, we’re here, but we’re gonna succeed, and he was really illiterate, functionally illiterate almost, but when he - now I’m gonna cry thinking about it - when he stood up to recite this poem he was so confident and so - I never saw him after that but when he graduated, his parents came, his family came and brought me a gift that said, “You just gave him hope. Turned him around.” And I can see him standing in front of class, his black t-shirt, his sagging jeans, you know, I can see him standing in the front reciting this song.

Shannon’s account of Darron’s story intrigued me. I inquired about him further, asking Shannon if she felt that Hip Hop was the motivational factor behind his success. She responded:

Absolutely. I mean I think it was a combination. One, I think it was that he was shocked that we were actually going to do something in class that was interesting to him, I think. Like, “What? We’re going to do something by Tupac? Like, are you serious? This is what we’re gonna do in class?” And I think it was just in general just that there was a teacher that was interested in something they were interested in and was trying to use it to help them be better. I mean, you know, I don’t think I singularly did that, but he came in class sullen and frustrated and feeling like this was going to be just a joke and I just saw his effort every single day and he was really trying.

Shannon was his middle school teacher. It pleased me to hear that, four years later, Darron ended up graduating from high school as well.
Akil stated that his students are motivated “From the jump” when Hip Hop is introduced in his classroom. He adds, “Students walk in and say, ‘Oh, you the cool teacher.’ And I respond, ‘Yeah, but don’t get it twisted, don’t get crazy, don’t get disrespectful, we’re not on the same level.” Akil has been teaching in the same community for twenty years. Many of his current students know him because he taught their older siblings, or because he went to school with their parents or uncles. As a result of his reputation in the community, he has to be strict with many students at the beginning. Once the respect level is established, Akil feels that many of his students are then motivated to learn - to learn how to write and read. Akil creates assignments where students not only write the lessons into raps, but he teaches them how to package the raps as well. Many of his former students end up in the studio attempting to produce the raps they have written. This adds another level of motivation as they are now out to market their product.

Paris also noticed her students’ motivational levels increase when Hip Hop was incorporated in her classroom. Paris stated that her students would randomly share with her metaphors and various forms of imagery from songs that they listened to outside of class. Once her students mastered a convention of the English language, they would often search for those conventions in a variety of texts throughout the remainder of the school year.

Maria and Heather, the only teachers in my study who learned how to incorporate Hip Hop within their curriculum after taking a Master’s level grad-course, experienced limited motivational changes in their students when incorporating Hip Hop into the lessons in their respective classrooms. They stated that when their students could identify
with the lyrics in a song or the song itself they were motivated to learn and work. But they added that if their students did not like a particular song, they were not really engaged into the lesson, nor were they motivated to produce quality work in their class.

Khalil did not experience positive motivational reactions when he introduced Hip Hop within his classroom as most of the teachers above. He states that although there is an initial excitement, that excitement lasts for about two weeks. Many of his students listen to different kinds of music, such as rock and metal. Instead, Khalil talks about incorporating popular culture, and not just Hip Hop:

Incorporating popular culture can produce a variety of levels of motivation and success. It all depends upon the intent that the teacher has behind what they’re doing and how the teachers are presenting the information. If they’re not presenting it in a way to where it’s going to be new, it’s going to be novel, it’s going to be exciting, it’s going to make connections to information that they already know... you could use music in any way, in any form, you could use poetry in any form, anyway, any class, you could use any type of lesson you want to cross over into different subjects, cause if you ask a student to write a song about the accomplishments of Albert Einstein, you’ve already covered history, cause he’s a historical figure, you’ve already covered science with him being a scientist and a mathematician, and you’ve covered English because now they’re writing. In any regard, you could use any type of song to cross over into any subject area.

Khalil’s account of popular culture incorporated within the curriculum versus Hip Hop alone makes me realize that not all students are going to be open to embracing Hip Hop. Although most of the teachers have had successful motivational experiences incorporating Hip Hop within their classrooms, the discussion to possibly reaching a consensus of what type of pop-cultural influences students identify with prior to incorporating any form of pop-culture as a form of culturally relevant pedagogy is recommended.
I cannot help but wonder if Maria and Heather’s students’ limited or lack of motivational growth is a direct result of Maria’s and Heather’s lack of authenticity when attempting to infuse Hip Hop within their lessons. Maria and Heather - the two participants who first learned how to incorporate Hip Hop within their curriculum by taking a Master’s level university course – who, other than Khalil, did not have the same success as the other participants in my study in relation to increased student motivation. Based on my findings, I believe that authentic Hip Hop “Heads” (those who have been fans of Hip Hop music and Hip Hop culture since their youth) turned educators may be better qualified to incorporate Hip Hop as form of CRP in secondary urban classrooms as opposed to educators who learn how to incorporate Hip Hop by taking a teacher preparation course at a university; but truth be told, this would leave an extremely low percentage of teachers who fall into this criteria. Maybe Hip Hop did not resonate well with Maria and Heather’s students because they first learned about Hip Hop and how to incorporate Hip Hop within the curriculum in their respective classrooms through the course they took at Loyola University. Students who identify with Hip Hop have the ability to tell if others - especially teachers who are attempting to incorporate Hip Hop within their classrooms - have a legitimate realness when discussing and infusing Hip Hop, a culture and musical genre that they hold so dear to their hearts, in their classrooms. As stated earlier, Black and Latino students from urban communities feel that Hip Hop belongs to them. Of the eight participants in my study who grew up listening to and identifying with Hip Hop since their youth, seven of them saw increases in student motivation when incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum, but three did not. This may have resulted in the students’ accepting of their teachers’ genuine understanding, appreciation, and love for Hip Hop
that their students attribute to credibility and trustworthiness. I would recommend to teachers, who plan on incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum in their classrooms after taking a university course, to be open and honest with their students by letting them know, prior to the infusion of Hip Hop within the lessons, that they learned how to incorporate Hip Hop within the curriculum through the course that they took. This way their students will know upfront that their teacher is not an authentic Hip Hop “Head”, but they are rather attempting to incorporate instructional material that they can related to and identify with, and therefore, have a greater appreciation for their teacher and their learning process.

Unfortunately, as Forell reminds us below, incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum is not the “magical” answer to solving concerns related to the achievement gap when discussing motivation or academic achievement of Black and Latino students who come from low-income urban communities. This being said, I do not think that every teacher will experience success when incorporating Hip Hop within their classrooms. Keeping in mind that the purpose of this study is to seek the experiences of teachers who have incorporated Hip Hop within their classroom as a form of culturally relevant pedagogy, there are many other forms of pedagogies that are culturally relevant that teachers who may not experience successful results when using of Hip Hop may try.

The reality is that most teachers are not Hip Hop Heads. I would assume that those teachers who identify with Hip Hop as a result of growing up listening to and connecting with Hip Hop culture are very few in numbers. When attempting to educate teachers on how to implement Hip Hop as a form of CRP in their classrooms, as in the case with Maria and Heather, teachers may find themselves in challenging and difficult
circumstances when seeking to motivate their students to succeed. I ponder the thought of exploring the experiences of other teachers, those who did not grow up listening to Hip Hop but have taken a university level Hip Hop preparation course, to see if they have found success with increasing the motivation of Black and Latino students from low-income urban communities. I also feel that this presents the need for additional research on a greater scale, possibly in urban communities outside of Los Angeles, to explore the backgrounds of teachers who are experiencing success with increased student motivation when incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum in their low-income urban classrooms.

Although Khalil did not perceive increased student motivation by incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum in his classrooms, and although Maria and Heather experienced limited increases in student motivation, the majority of the participants within my study did feel that by incorporating Hip Hop within their classrooms, student motivation increased. Since educators often feel that students of color from low-income backgrounds are not “fit” for academic success due to their poverty status, lack of motivation for high achievement, poor command of Standard English, intellectual deficiency, and their overall lack of value towards education (Bernstein, 1961; J.E. King, 1991; Pine & Hilliard, 1990; Riessman, 1962), incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum in secondary urban classrooms does help to bridge the curriculum to the lived experiences of urban Black and Latino students. Infusing Hip Hop into the classroom becomes a great tool that, according to the majority of the participants in my study, motivates students to actively engage in their learning process. Based on this finding, this study recommends in particular to teachers who might face challenges when attempting
to motivate their urban Black and Latino students to engage in their learning, to explore and understand how the incorporation of Hip Hop within their classroom can increase student motivation. In addition, administrators and leaders of secondary urban schools in low-income communities ought to explore the potential benefits of incorporating Hip Hop in such spaces of learning. Through professional developments led by educators - within respective districts - who have experienced positive results when incorporating Hip Hop in their classrooms, teachers should be trained and be better prepared when introducing Hip Hop, as one form of culturally relevant pedagogical practices, within their urban classrooms.

**Academic Achievement**

It has been shown, based on my findings, that incorporating Hip Hop as a form of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in low-income urban classrooms creates fundamental student/teacher relationships that are imperative when attempting to improve student academic achievement; but does it really help improve academic achievement for Black and Latino students who live in low-income urban communities? According to Shannon, it absolutely does. Shannon believes, through the experiences that she has had working with Black students from low-income urban communities, that improved academic achievement is a result of the confidence student’s gain when Hip Hop is incorporated within their learning environment. She states, “By incorporating Hip Hop, you are validating and affirming the students’ culture. You are respecting the student’s opinion; therefore making the student feel that their perspective counts for something.” Shannon feels that validating and affirming a student’s’ culture, uplifting the students’ confidence, and respecting student’s’ opinions are all factors that contribute to the students’ improved
academic achievement. By incorporating Hip Hop within the classroom, Shannon states, “You are knowing your students and meeting your students where they are… you are building a bridge to what they need to know and learn.” These connections, according to Shannon, are also the benefits that result in improved student academic achievement.

Paris also found improvements in student academic achievement when she incorporates Hip Hop in her classroom. After having to provide her administrator data to show that incorporating Hip Hop within her classroom is actually beneficial to instruction and student achievement, Paris stated, “I found that there was about 20% increase of overall scores during those benchmarks that I use hip-hop instruction in my classroom.” Odom also stated that he definitely noticed improvements in student academic achievement when Hip Hop was incorporated within his classroom and curriculum, stating, “It gives the students the extra push they need,” as seen with his one particular student mentioned above. “She was ready to quit. She was tired of getting C’s,” Odom explained, “But it definitely helps them (students) academically because they now have a will to learn because of the music.” When asked about the benefits that Hip Hop brings to his classroom, Odom declared, “Student engagement, and test scores go up.”

In discussing an eighth grade algebra readiness class, Odom affirms, that as a result of incorporating Hip Hop within the classroom and curriculum, kids who are not necessarily doing well academically do better. Odom chronicles:

You know, I have one group; this is like my favorite, you know, story to tell. I have a group, the very first time I was able to have a class for a whole year with my music, it was algebra readiness class. You know, eighth grade algebra readiness, students that all failed seventh grade math, I get them next year, and 66% of those kid’s scores went up. And it was just because, you know, they were motivated now, they were happy, they were having fun because we would write songs. We were writing songs in
class. You know, I would perform songs for them, and I would just so happy when I got those CST scores like that they went up, like 66% of them. Yeah, it was a real nice experience, real nice.

Here, Odom and Paris provide quantitative data to exhibit the impact incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum had on improved student achievement.

When asked about improved student academic achievement, Seb started laughing, “Not always, that’s the problem.” He describes how the incorporation of Hip Hop within the curriculum in his classroom helps students improve academically in English and history, but not in other classes. He explains:

That’s one of the things that disturb me the most, I wish that class would be affective to the point that students would go to all their other classes and excel in all subjects. Except in history and English where teachers have told me they’ve noticed a difference, I can’t say it’s across the board. They do well in my class, but not across the board.

But Seb provided me with the reported outcomes of his Hip Hop elective class entitled *Global Awareness through Hip Hop* that shed some positive light on student achievement. It describes how many of the high school students who entered his classroom wrote at a fifth grade level. This resulted in low performance during the early stages of the class. Through meetings, students were reminded of the importance of developing their language arts skills. Students were also encouraged to have high expectations for themselves. Although it was a struggle for some students, Seb stated, “By the end of the year, no student had a “D” or “Fail” in their Hip Hop elective class.

Unfortunately, none of the other participants were able to provide such data. Walker stated that he noticed student achievement improve, but did not provide any meaningful or concrete data to substantiate his experiences other than stating, “I would
have never guessed that students would have improved academically judging them at first. It was great to see.”

Although Heather was unable to provide any data to evidence improved academic achievement, she stated that incorporating Hip Hop within her classroom has helped students improve their academic achievement, because Hip Hop as a form of literature, connects the old with the new. She explains:

It connects the old and the new. I’m an English teacher and I want them to see that Poe, Dickinson, these authors they were human beings just like these guys and they had their own issues and they were writing to explain how they felt and they were writing because of what was in their environment - so same concept. Modern day Hip Hop artists, singers, or any writers. They’re expressing their thoughts and their feelings and what their environment is giving them and it’s an art. To me, English and writing is an art. Literature is an art form. So even though they are rapping or singing and there’s the instrumental or the melody, the harmony, the language is art too. What they say, how they control the words, that’s an art form. Writing is an art form. So it’s very important for me to connect the old and the new and show them that it’s really all the same. Students will benefit… it’s just really important to connect students from the old and the new and one way to do that is through Hip Hop.

Kris also feels that incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum connects the old with the new, and does improve students’ academic performance, but even though Heather’s narrative provides one great example as to why teachers in urban communities should incorporate Hip Hop within their urban classrooms and the curriculum, it does not provide concrete information that exemplifies the affects that incorporating Hip Hop has on improved student academic achievement. We see this again with the narratives from the other participants. Maria stated, when asked about improved student academic achievement, “Absolutely,” but her justification was simply:

If a student can take a high level thought process and apply it to something that they consider easy when they’re still applying that high level thought
process, like taking Hip Hop lyrics and putting it in academic language, then they’re successful.

Here, Maria does not provide any examples as to how, or to what level, incorporating Hip Hop within her classroom has improved her students’ academic achievement. This goes for Paris as well, who stated that she can “manipulate” students’ thought process where her minority urban students could benefit academically, but provides no concrete examples of academic improvements.

Khalil did not experience any improved student achievement and stated, “Although there was a lot more participation… students may have been interested in doing their work, but not interested enough to complete their assignments.”

Given the lack of concrete statistical data through the narratives of the experiences of the participants in my study, I cannot measure or provide any benchmarks to gauge the levels of improved student academic achievement as a result of Hip Hop being incorporated into the curriculum or infused within their lessons. Although I am unable to conclude that incorporating Hip Hop in low-income secondary urban classrooms improves the academic achievement of Black and Latino students, based on the narratives of Shannon, Paris, Odom, and Seb, student academic achievement has improved with some students when Hip Hop has been incorporated within the classroom.

**Resistance**

“For many students, hip-hop could be the key; yet it seems there is a great deal of resistance against making use of such powerful stories” (Forell, 2006, p. 30-31). Forell explains that Hip Hop tells stories; stories from marginalized youth from marginalized communities, usually from the vantage point that most elite Americans refuse to acknowledge. She continues to add that incorporating Hip Hop within urban education
will not produce a “magical transformation in society” (p. 31), but by silencing Hip Hop, educators perceive that Hip Hop poses some sort of threat to the well-being and education of urban youth. This was evident when there was a change of administration at Seb’s school. Rather than acknowledging why Hip Hop was being taught in the school, or seeking to understand what academic or motivational outcomes emerged as a result of Hip Hop being taught, the class was dismissed, teachers and students were silenced, and, according to Seb, the school became a place where “dreams come to die”, all due to the fact that there was a need to fill another position.

Rox, Shannon, and Heather also encountered experiences of resistance by teachers and administrators due to the misunderstanding of the negative connotations that are attached with Hip Hop’s mislead and questionable reputation. Rox explained how those who oppose Hip Hop’s infusion into the curriculum are not even willing to explore the positive effects it may have. Shannon described how she was always willing to sit with educational leaders and justify how Hip Hop is not only beneficial, but how her Hip Hop infused lessons are tied in with the State’s content standards. Heather, who was a new teacher when she first encountered opposition from her immediate colleagues, took a risk and decided that regardless of any opposition she would still give Hip Hop a chance in her classroom. She was thrilled that she did as her narratives shared success stories with some of the students she worked with. Regardless of any opposition they may have faced, all three continued to incorporate Hip Hop within their classrooms, because as Kris puts it, “it works.”

According to Stone Hanley (2007) Black people and people of color historically have often grappled with oppressive conditions in this country; therefore they often
connect to black popular music because it represents an alternative space where they proudly claim opposition to white claims of superiority (p. 36). People of color from marginalized communities, Black youth specifically, connect with Hip Hop, a culture and musical genre created by Black youth in the 70s, as a means to deal with oppressive conditions in the low-income communities in which they live. This is the exact reason why Seb and Shannon feel that Hip Hop should be incorporated within the curriculum of secondary urban schools. They both described how Hip Hop is the tool that connects what urban students from marginalized communities find to have value in their world to the curriculum. Seb added that this is particularly important now because “the educational system is flawed, and it’s collapsing.” For today’s teaching population, when educating teachers to learn how to use and incorporate Hip Hop in their classrooms, Hip Hop becomes a diverse multicultural tool, one that can reconstruct the social acceptance and engagement of urban youth, all the while establishing a more equitable educational system. But does this mean that any form of Hip Hop can be incorporated within public education?

Hip Hop is an art form, music, and culture that come in many different forms and genres. Since the birth of Hip Hop, there have been many changes as Hip Hop has evolved throughout the years. For the purpose of my study’s recommendations, in order to discuss the appropriate forms of Hip Hop that should be incorporated within instruction, I present Prier’s (2012) approach to Hip Hop as he separates the genre and culture into three different categories: (a) gangsta rap; (b) mass-marketed commercialized rap; and (c), socially/politically conscious rap.
In discussing gangsta rap, Prier (2012) states, “Gangsta discourses in hip-hop reflected a deep sense of disappointment, rage, and anger to social, political, and economic neglect in urban inner cities across Black and Brown America” (p. 44). George (1999) agrees stating that Hip Hop culture is the authentic representation of the fear and rage of postindustrial urban youth. Gangsta rap emerged as a subcultural form of Hip Hop and confronted the American public as a threat due to the neglect and exploitation of the urban youth (Low, 2011). McLaren (1997) contends that although gangsta rap contains violent and nihilistic lyrics, teachers in urban schools can use these lyrics to analyze and understand the knowledge and social identities of urban youth’s oppositional and oppressive practices. Gangsta rap is successfully being used to educate students at community centers across this country (Dimitriadis, 2009; Hill, 2009; Prier, 2012). While none of the participants used “gangsta rap” in their instruction, in considering the appropriate use of Hip Hop, “gangsta rap”, while controversial, according to Prier, I should be considered when incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum in urban schools. If teachers do decide to incorporate “gangsta rap” within their instruction, they would have to carefully negotiate how it is to be used as to not send a wrong message to students. When infusing “gangsta rap” within a lesson, teachers might want to type up the lyrics, leaving blank spaces where profane and explicit words appear, prior to presenting the lesson when engaging students in appropriate discourse about the issues being discussed in class. Incorporating “gangsta rap” within urban education and addressing why such terminology is being used also produces opportunities where teachers could prepare students to engage in such dialogue in professional settings, all-
the-while appropriating the purpose and intention of the artists’ choice and decision behind such word usage.

Five companies; AOL Time Warner, Bertelsmann, EMI, Sony, and Vivendi Universal own 80 percent of the U.S. media market (Prier, 2012). Mass-marketed commercial rap is a form of rap or Hip Hop that has the sole purpose of generating financial wealth, maximization for profit and corporate interest, for these corporations – the record company executives in particular - and what the artist(s) hope will get them rich beyond their wildest dreams. Commercial Hip Hop is what emcee’s (rappers who have a passion for the culture of Hip Hop) like to consider “dumbed-down” lyrics over “bubble-gum” beats. There are no meanings, important messages, or any other purpose behind commercial rap other than monetary profits. Mass-marketed commercial rap is what Prier (2012) refers to as music that “privilege profit over critical needs of local community” and where “urban life is sold as a commodity.” There is absolutely no use or space in educational settings where this form of rap music or Hip Hop can conceivably be beneficial for urban youth, other than using it as an example to educate the youth about corporate greed, or false misrepresentations for failed success of artists who portray an image of themselves and their lifestyles that are not necessarily true.

The type of Hip Hop that can and should be considered as part of the curriculum for secondary public schools, particularly low-income urban schools, is socially/politically conscious Hip Hop/rap. Prier describes this third category of Hip Hop as:

Socially/Politically conscious artists discuss postindustrialization, wealth inequities, joblessness, dilapidated schools and housing, disinvestment in public social services, and imprisonment and police brutality… for these artists and activists it is about raising consciousness and awareness about
the world in which one lives, giving voice to those circumstances and conditions, and organizing ways in which to alleviate the realities of human suffering. It is also about privileging knowledge of self, a love for one’s community, and providing organized ways in which to resist structures of domination. (p. 37)

Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2002) agree, stating that by incorporating conscious and progressive Hip Hop in urban education, educators can facilitate the development of critical consciousness in urban youth. Conscious Hip Hop artists, such as Nas, Talib Kweli, Dead Prez, the Roots, Common, Immortal Technique, Lupe Fiasco, Lauryn Hill, Public Enemy, KRS One, Aesop Rock, Q-Tip, and Mos Def to name a few, articulate critical discourses addressing issues of systemic injustice related to matters such as education and schooling, health care, joblessness, police brutality, reparations, foreign policy, family matters, voting rights, the overrepresentation of Black males in the prison industrial complex, and the overall politics that confront life lived at the margins of urban communities (Dyson, 2004; Kitwana, 2002). These are the artists - rather Hip Hop emcee’s - who provide the rich contextual material, in the form of lyrics and literature, that the participants in my study incorporate in their classroom lessons.

Why Incorporate Hip Hop?

As the times continue to change, education continues to fail to promote and establish high expectations that encourage all students to succeed (Howard, 2008; Schwartz, 2001). No longer can we rely on canonical texts or traditional methods to teaching when attempting to develop strategies to narrow the achievement gap (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002; Dimitriadis, 2009; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002, 2004; Noguera, 2004; Weinstein, 2007). Paris and Heather agree, stating that using traditional European texts and teaching strategies is
“doing our students a disservice”, particularly when attempting to teach urban students of color. They add that the same English conventions that are found in traditional texts, which are oftentimes challenging to teach to Black and Latino urban youth, are also found in Hip Hop lyrics and literature, and therefore Hip Hop should be incorporated into the curriculum in urban schools because not only can students identify with the culture, they can learn what is needed to be taught. Dimitriadis (2009) states “Understanding youth culture and school life today demands that we look past traditional disciplinary frameworks toward more interdisciplinary ones, including those offered in cultural studies and its iterations in applied disciplines such as communication and education” (p. xxi). Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2002) remind us:

There are countless possibilities for urban educators who wish to jump outside the box and tap into the worlds of their students in order to make more powerful connections with traditional academic texts and affirm, in meaningful ways, the everyday lives of those they teach” (p. 91).

Walker, Khalil, Kris, Odom, and Rox all stated that urban youth are listening to Hip Hop every day; it is what they connect to, what drives their attention, their language, their daily lived experiences, and the world they know. Whether using Hip Hop lyrics or literature from songs, having students write raps about material they’ve learned in their core classes, or as in the case of Mr. Odom having the teacher create his/her own raps to be used during instruction, I recommend that Hip Hop, as an alternative pedagogical strategy and form of culturally relevant pedagogy, be considered by educational leaders for its potential instructional benefits in secondary urban classrooms (Hill, 2009).

Administrators and teachers of urban schools should learn how to incorporate Hip Hop widely throughout the school in all core disciplines. Schools should provide teachers with resources such as Cirelli and Sitomer’s (2004) *Hip-Hop Poetry and the Classics for*
the Classroom, or Elkouby’s (2006) Global Awareness through Hip Hop Culture Program. Teachers should take teacher preparation courses at universities such as Sitomer’s Trends in the Teaching of Secondary Education at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, or at the countless other universities that offer such courses including Harvard, NYU, Howard, Rice, Ohio State, Georgetown, Wisconsin, Houston, Miami, Stanford, Duke, Florida State, Temple, University of California, Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, etc. Teachers should attend Hip Hop conferences at universities, such as California State University, Northridge’s LA Hip Hop Beyond Gangsta Rap conference, or New York Universities Urban Word Pre-Emptive Education conference, or Ohio State Universities Hip Hop Literacy conference, or the countless conferences on how to incorporate Hip Hop within urban education across this country.

Summary

All the teachers in my study felt that incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum of their low-income urban secondary classrooms created the necessary relationships between them and their Black and Latino students. Most of the teachers believe that Hip Hop was the reason behind their student’s’ increased motivation. In respect to increased student academic achievement, my study does not provide evidence to substantiate to what level students have actually increased or improved their academic achievement. I believe that my research only scratches the surface in addressing the need to improve student academic achievement by incorporating Hip Hop as a form of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in order to narrow the achievement gap.

Runell Hall (2011) feels that additional research should be conducted on the levels of increased student motivation and the impact incorporating Hip Hop has on
student academic achievement as a result of the increasing interconnection between the current generation of urban Black and Latino students and popular culture genres such as Hip Hop. According to Perchauer (2009), “many uses of hip-hop in school curricula are uncritical themselves and have not taken into consideration if these programs help students learn course material, improve their motivation to learn, or increase graduation rates” (p. 964), but he suggests that further research be conducted in order to truly see and understand the affects and implications of Hip Hop education in school curricula. I agree with Perchauer that, in order to indicate the effects Hip Hop has when incorporated within the curriculum in relation to improved student academic achievement, additional research must be conducted on how to best incorporate Hip Hop into the curriculum, and how the research can provide implications for practice.

Although research on the effects of Hip Hop within spaces of learning exists and universities across this country are expanding in such research and Hip Hop related programs and organizations, further research must be conducted on a larger scale, for a longer duration of time, and in a variety of urban communities across this country, where both qualitative and quantitative data can be collected in the form of student work samples, periodic assessment scores, standardized test scores, and student interviews and focus groups where the students themselves provide rich narratives about their learning strengths and weaknesses when Hip Hop is incorporated into the lessons that they are learning. Also, additional research is needed that explores the views that parents have in understanding how Hip Hop is being used in classrooms, research that explores the feasibility of incorporating Hip Hop across various disciplines, and research that addresses resistance and opposition versus acceptance, in order to truly gauge to what
level incorporating Hip Hop within the curriculum improves student academic achievement with the purpose of incorporating Hip Hop as a culturally relevant pedagogical practice that may assist in decreasing this nation’s achievement gap.
References


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NCLB (2001).


Appendix A

Ayk A. Terjimanian
IRB application
November 1, 2011

Email from LAUSD teacher to teachers who experienced using Hip Hop based instruction with low-income urban middle and high school students:

Dear ______________,

I am writing you to let you know about a dissertation study that I will be conducting at various urban middle and high schools across the United State regarding the perceptions of teachers who have experience using Hip Hop based instruction with their low-income urban middle and high school students. The study I will conduct if for my CSUN doctoral program as part of the requirements to earn an Ed.D. degree.

In my study, I will be exploring teacher perceptions of possible connections between Hip Hop based instruction and student academic student achievement and motivation. As part of my research, I will conduct confidential, private interviews with teachers to obtain their perceptions and opinions about how the use of Hip Hop based education within the curriculum has affected, if at all, student academic achievement and motivation. Responses used in my dissertation will be anonymous, thus your name will not appear in the study. Each interview should be approximately 45 minutes in length.

If you would like to participate, please contact me at MrTerjimanian@aol.com or (818) 292-3424. Your decision to participate or not participate is an individual decision and your consideration is greatly appreciated.

Thank you,
Teacher Perceptions of Hip Hop based Curriculum

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

RESEARCH TEAM
Researcher:
Ayk A. Terjimanian, Doctoral Candidate
LAUSD
(818) 292-3424

Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Miguel Ceja
Associate Professor
Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330-8265

PURPOSE OF STUDY
The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the perceptions of teachers who use Hip Hop based curriculum in low-income urban middle and high schools. Specifically, this study will examine to what extent teachers perceive their experiences have increased student motivation and academic achievement among low-income urban middle and high school students.

SUBJECTS
Inclusion Requirements
You are eligible to participate in this study if you:
- All participants will have to have had at least one year experience using Hip Hop within the curriculum during instruction.
- All participants will have to have had or have their teaching experiences and instruction take place at low-income urban middle or high schools with poor students of color, primarily Black and Latino students.
- All participants will have to be willing volunteers in order to truly conduct interviews and observations that will produce authentic and trustworthy findings.
• All participants will need to have a clear understanding of the Hip Hop culture, and must be Hip Hop “heads”, those who have a love and appreciation for Hip Hop, rather than teaching it because they have been asked to by their administrators.

**Time Commitment**

• This study will involve an approximate 45-60 minute interview with you.
• This study will require me to observe you while you are incorporating Hip Hop based instruction within the curriculum on three different days of observations with the same group of students.

**PROCEDURES**

The following procedures will occur:

• You will complete an interview that will take between 45-60 minutes of your time.
• You will be observed in your classroom for duration of three different days of observation with the same class (group of students) where you incorporate your lessons with Hip Hop based instruction within the curriculum.

**RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life.

**BENEFITS**

*Subject Benefits*

You will not directly benefit from participation in this study.

*Benefits to Others or Society*

Depending on the findings and implications of this study, low-income students of color from urban secondary schools might benefit as a result of your perceptions regarding the use of Hip Hop based instruction within the curriculum in relation to student motivation and academic achievement as an alternative method of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.

**ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION**

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

**COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT**

**Compensation for Participation**

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

*Costs*

There is no cost to you for participation in this study.
WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. **If you decide to withdraw from this study you should notify the research team immediately.** The research team may also end your participation in this study if you do not follow instructions, miss scheduled visits, or if your safety and welfare are at risk.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Subject Identifiable Data

- All identifiable information that will be collected about you will be removed at the end of data collection.
- All identifiable information that will be collected about you will be removed and replaced with a code. A list linking the code and your identifiable information will be kept separate from the research data.
- All identifiable information that will be collected about you will be kept with the research data.

Data Storage

- All research data will be stored on a laptop computer that is password protected.
- All research data will be stored electronically on a secure computer with password protection.
- The audio recording will also be stored electronically on a secure computer with password protection; then transcribed and erased as soon as possible.
- The audio will also be stored in a secure location; then transcribed and erased at the end of the study.

Data Access

The researcher(s) and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

Data Retention

- The researchers intend to keep the research data indefinitely.
- The researchers intend to keep the research data in a repository indefinitely. Other researchers will have access to the data for future research.
IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS
If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you are unable to reach a member of the research team listed on the first page of the form and have general questions, or you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT
You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

I agree to participate in the study.

__________________________  __________________
Subject Signature                Date

___________________________________________  __________________
Printed Name of Subject

___________________________________________  __________________
Researcher Signature                Date

Printed Name of Researcher
Appendix B

Interview Protocol Questions for an Inner City Secondary School Teacher

Introductory Questions

1. Thank you for meeting with me today. How has your day been thus far?
2. Any interesting stories or interactions you’ve experienced today worth mentioning?
3. Let’s get started. Where did you first get the idea of incorporating Hip Hop within your curriculum?
4. In which core disciplines is Hip Hop based instruction used in your classroom instruction?
   - Please elaborate on a few examples you have used in your lessons.

Hip Hop as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

5. What are some examples of Hip Hop literature or lyrics you have used within your curriculum?
   - What literature has worked the best for you?
   - What have you used that you think you won’t use again in the future?
6. How did you first begin to incorporate Hip Hop within your curriculum?

Teacher Perceptions of Hip Hop as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

7. What were the initial reactions of your students when you first began to use Hip Hop based instruction?
   - What changes or adjustments did you make as you began using Hip Hop based instruction?
   - Did you notice any motivational changes in your students after introducing Hip Hop within the curriculum?
• Did you notice academic changes or improvements in your students’ achievement?
• Think of one student or one class. Walk me through a lesson you have used.

8. What are some of the benefits you’ve encountered using Hip Hop based instruction in your curriculum?
   • Have you built on some of the strengths you’ve experienced with Hip Hop based instruction into additional lessons?
   • Can you share some examples?

9. What are some of the drawbacks?
   • How have you resolved those challenges?
   • Can you think of a time when you used Hip Hop based instruction and it didn’t work well?
   • What happened? Can you provide some examples?

10. What Hip Hop influences are you aware of in other areas of the school?
    • Has your decision to use Hip Hop based instruction motivated any of your colleagues to incorporate Hip Hop into their instruction or core discipline?

11. Were you faced with any resistance or opposition from the faculty or administration when you decided to incorporate Hip Hop into your curriculum?
    • How did you deal with those who questioned your intention and purpose for using Hip Hop based instruction?

**Hip Hop as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy used to Decrease the Achievement Gap**

12. Why do you feel the need to incorporate Hip Hop based instruction and education at an urban middle/high school?
• Which type of students do you feel benefit the most from this type of instruction?

• How do you feel Hip Hop based instruction would affect students at a suburban middle or high school, or students from middle class income families?

13. How do you feel other teachers at other urban middle or high schools could benefit by using Hip Hop based instruction?

14. What advice do you have to other teachers who are interested in using Hip Hop based instruction within the curriculum?